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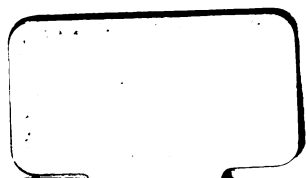
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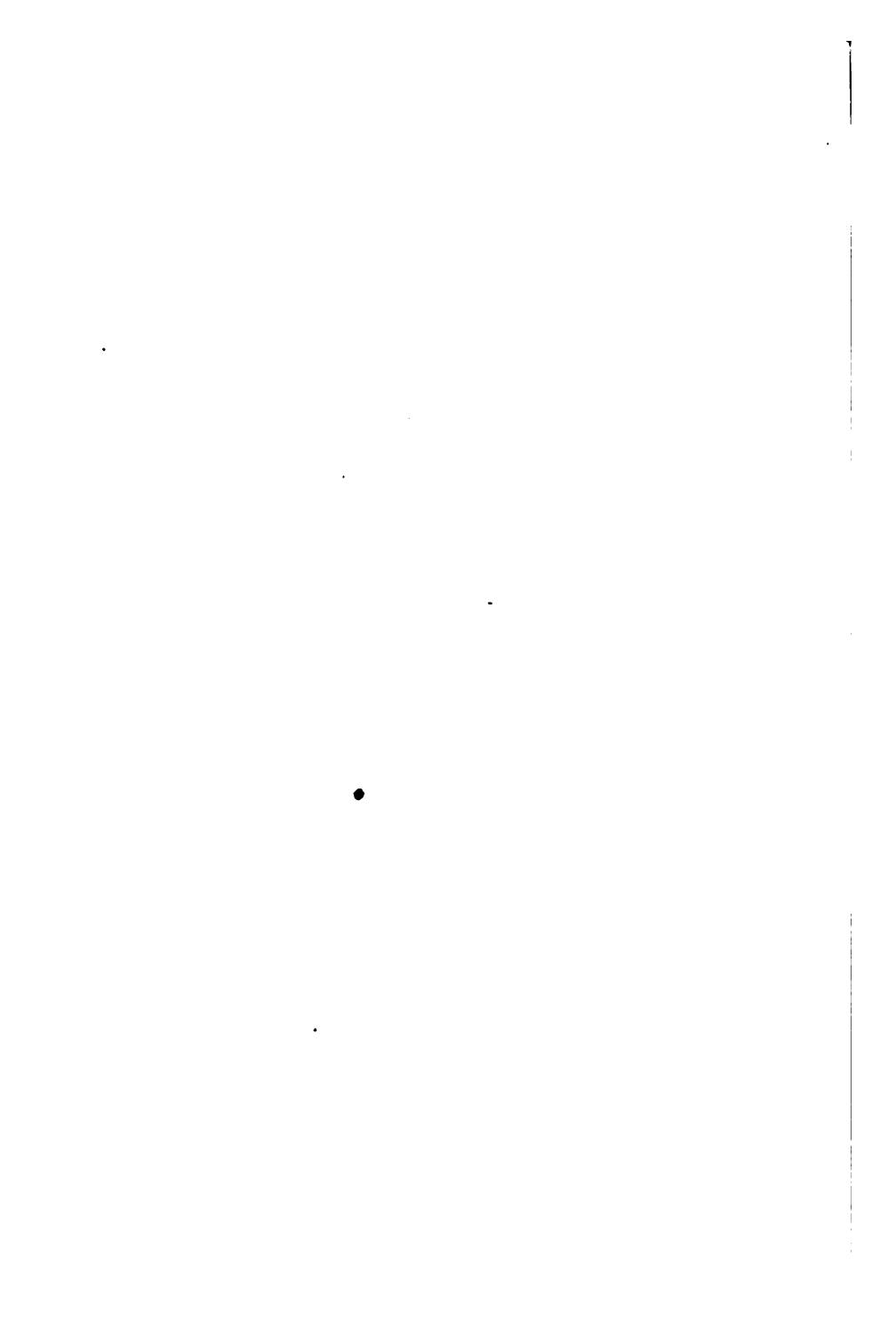
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GEORGE VANBRUGH'S MISTAKE.

BY

H. BADEN PRITCHARD,

AUTHOR OF "OLD CHARLTON," "DANGERFIELD," "BEAUTY SPOTS,"
"TRAMPS IN THE TYROL," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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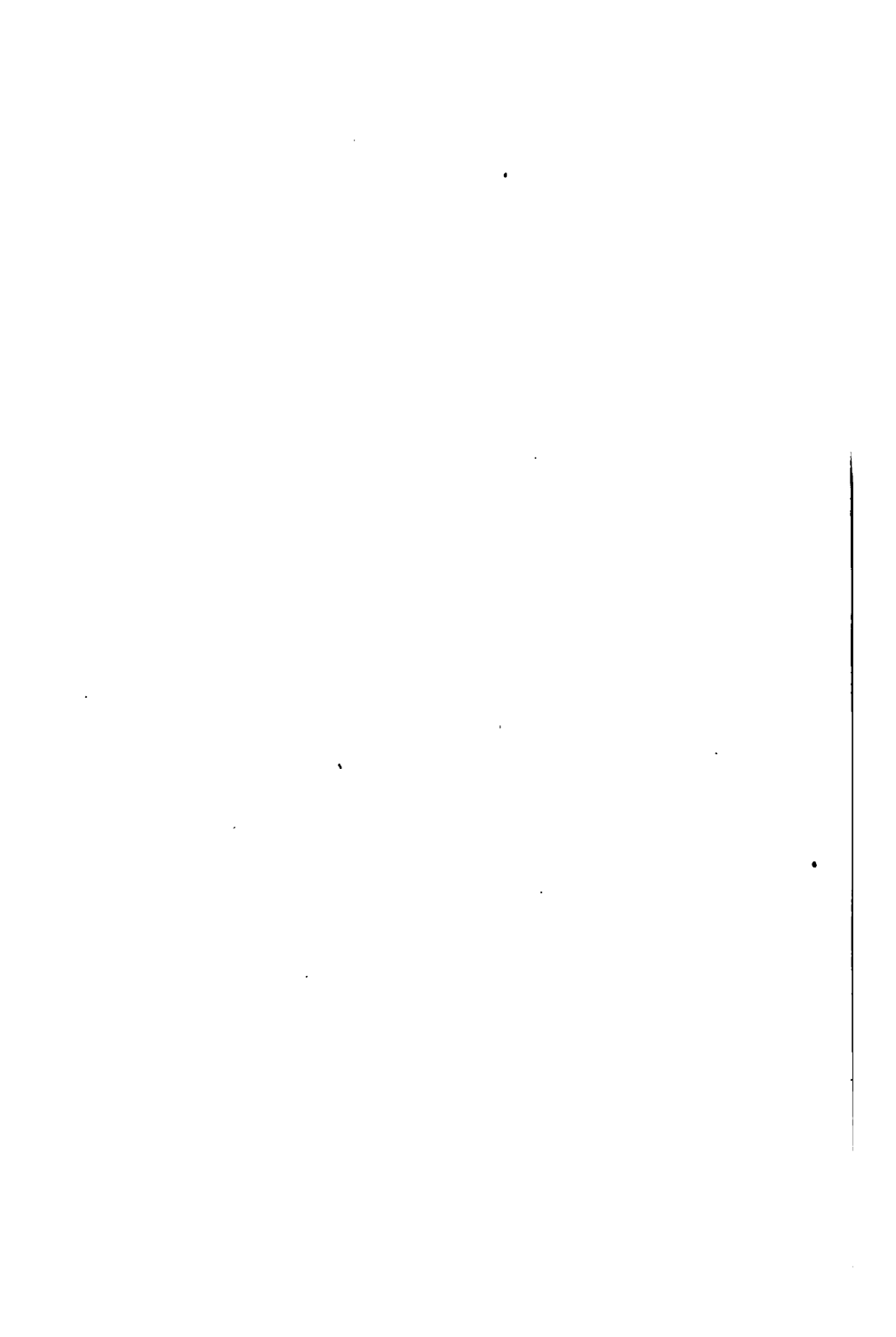
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TO
MY EARNEST FELLOW-WORKERS,
THE LITTLE PHILOSOPHER
AND
MASTER WAT
These Volumes
ARE LOVINGLY DEDICATED.

OLD CHARLTON, KENT,
April, 1880.



CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "PARKLE'S PURE LAVENDER WATER" ...	1
II. TWO TRAMPS	22
III. GEORGE VANBRUGH'S MENTOR ...	41
IV. THE LADIES OF LANTHRADYNE ...	64
V. EVIL COMMUNICATIONS CORRUPT GOOD MANNERS	87
VI. THE NEW MAGAZINE	110
VII. GEORGE VANBRUGH PUTS A QUESTION AND GETS AN ANSWER	131
VIII. A BROWN GLOVE	153
IX. MR. EDWARD SHORTER AT HOME ...	173
X. MR. SHORTER SUCCOURS LOVELY WOMAN IN DISTRESS	195
XI. ALONE IN LONDON	217
XII. LUCY BREAKS HER PROMISE ...	239
XIII. STORMING A STRONGHOLD	261

GEORGE VANBRUGH'S MISTAKE.

CHAPTER I.

“PARKLE’S PURE LAVENDER WATER.”

ONE of the turnings on your left in walking from Sadler’s Wells towards Coldbath Fields is called Hart Street, Clerkenwell. Hart Street is not a pleasant neighbourhood under any circumstances, and in hot weather, and at this time of the day especially, when the sun strikes the streets so truly that there is not an inch breadth of shadow on either side of the way, the heat and closeness are well-nigh insupportable. Hart Street

might be taken for the meridian line in this respect, and when the sun once gets into the place, the perspiring inhabitants, apparently, have to put up with its yellow glare all day long.

At this moment there is not a soul in the shabby little street. Everybody is indoors out of the sweltering sun. The only signs of life are inside the swing door of the public-house at the corner, whence issues a stale beery smell. On the shining hot doorstep is a syrupy pool, as if some spilt beer had begun to dry before it had well time to run, and upon the blistered varnish of the door-posts big blue flies have settled flat and firm, sunning themselves in the burning glow. More flies favour the cheesemonger's next door, where the atmosphere under the canvas awning is still more stuffy and unpleasant; and next door to that is an

old-fashioned shop, painted a dark green, through the small panes of which the sun cannot enter so readily because of the bunches of dried herbs that hang in the window.

For all that, it is warm enough inside the shop, and a man who sits working on a high stool by the counter has taken off his coat and waistcoat, exposing to view a tumbled shirt and an uneven pair of worsted braces. He is probably fifty years of age, and wears a pair of round-rimmed spectacles; but he is nevertheless active and busy to a degree, and clips away at some labels with tremendous energy.

When it comes to putting these labels on a row of bottles before him, the heat rather interferes with his labours, and he has several times to rub his fingers upon his shirt-sleeves to remove the stickiness

that pervades everything. Besides, the fine gilt labels themselves get dirty in the process, and show impressions of Job Hollings's fingers.

"Consarn it, there's another of 'em!" he presently made remark.

"What's that, Job?" said an old woman who sat stitching at the back of the shop, and who took off her spectacles to look, an operation that was followed by Job when he turned to his mistress.

"These labels; they stick everywhere but on the bottles."

"That's because you are so impatient, Job. You are always for doing things in such a hurry."

Job straightened his back and stretched out his neck, seeking to relieve himself from the oppressive heat. Then, after a moment's pause, he said—

"It's all very well, but I must finish

this order if I am to take it with me to-morrow. It will save carriage, and I can deliver it myself. Miss Medlicott lives within a stone's throw of our lavender strip at Dalebrook, you know."

The order in question was not a large one, consisting simply of four half-pint bottles of lavender water, but to tie up the corks with white leather and to affix the grand labels, "Parkle's Pure Lavender Water," was to Job a task of infinite concern.

"And you will collect the digitalis about Sandham on your way?"

"Yes, in Sandham Wood; or if it is scarce I shall walk on to Dalling, and get the train home from there."

"There is nothing else wanted?" asked Mrs. Parkle.

"Crawford and Co. want some bella-

donna, but they are in no hurry for it ; if there is none in the Sandham gravel pits, they must wait till I make my north circuit."

Job here resumed his spectacles and his work, and Mrs. Parkle had perforce to do the same. But the latter was not altogether satisfied that Job had the interest of the firm entirely at heart in his projected journey to Dalebrook, and determined to know more about it. They wanted some lavender, it is true, and the digitalis had been particularly asked for by one of their druggist customers ; but Job from a lad had been notorious for playing the truant, and required to be ruled by a firm hand. It was only because she had taken a severe course with him all these years—for Mr. Parkle had died long since—that he had been kept in the right path.

"Job!" cried Mrs. Parkle, again snapping off her glasses with those claw-like fingers.

Her assistant was sitting bolt upright with his arms akimbo, regarding with much satisfaction the little row of bottles before him, now all provided with clean labels and white caps. He left off smiling at once, and, doffing his spectacles too, turned to his mistress.

"Job!"

"Well."

Mrs. Parkle looked as severe as she could, and said slowly—

"Who is this Miss Medlicott?"

"Who is she?" repeated Job, with a twinkle of his mild eyes.

"Yes. I hope I speak plain enough. Who is she, Job?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," said Job, rubbing the bristles of his chin with

his hand, and rather amused by his mistress's manner.

"You mean you won't tell me," cried the old woman.

"I don't mean anything of the sort."

"Do you think I can't guess who she is?" said Mrs. Parkle, getting warmer and more spiteful.

"Well, I don't know," replied the wondering Job.

"I'll try, anyhow. It's some young hussy or other you are going to marry. But don't make too sure, my fine fellow. You don't know anything about these matters. You must get your employer's consent, and, let me tell you, I shall not give it."

Mrs. Parkle snapped up her spectacles and went on with her work, but as Job was some time in replying, she took them off again, and glared with her little red eyes once more before resuming.

Job swung his legs good-humouredly as he sat on the stool.

"What! and won't you let us come and live here and have your business, eh?"

Mrs. Parkle was quite aware by Job's tone that he was only quizzing. From the first, indeed, she probably knew there was no truth in her accusations, but she believed it to be the best plan of getting to know what she wanted. Consequently the old lady still preserved her grim countenance, and went on with her sewing.

Job became quite boy-like under the circumstances.

"But, seriously, don't you think it's time I took a wife?"

Mrs. Parkle deigned no reply.

"I'm sure I'm old enough."

"I'm sure you are fool enough, if that is what you mean."

"Well, whichever you please."

"Job Hollings," cried Mrs. Parkle, angrily, putting down her work with one hand and her glasses with the other, "let me tell you once for all that, if ever you presume to bring any saucy baggage here, I'll have you both turned out of doors neck and crop."

Mrs. Parkle was out of temper, not because she suspected Job, but because he refused to gratify her curiosity in respect to the lady customer at Dalebrook. Her *ruse* had been of no avail. The vexatious Job, instead of at once denying the impeachment, had evaded her by admitting it.

In the mean time, as his mistress had grown more violent, Job, with the air of a man who knew well what he was about, turned round to his work with a quiet "All right."

Mrs. Parkle watched him for some moments, and then, in a subdued voice, said, "When are you going to tell me about this Miss Medicott?"

"When you leave off talking nonsense," returned Job, half turning round.

"Do you mean to say you are not for ever taking or sending her things?"

"And don't she pay for them?"

Mrs. Parkle was going to be spiteful again, and said something about not knowing whether her customers paid or not, but catching Job's eye at the moment, muttered that she supposed the things were paid for.

"Very well, then."

"Only now she asks you how elder-flower water is made."

"But I haven't told her, have I?"

"You will, though."

"Perhaps I shall and perhaps I shan't ;

in any case she will pay for the information."

"How?"

"As she has done before, by letting me sleep in the lodge. How many times have you paid for a bed for me at Dalebrook when I went to look after the lavender, I should like to know?"

"Ah, Job, I see," said Mrs. Parkle, in an injured tone. "And so you have met together, have you, and grown to like one another very much. I was born to be lonely, and I have no right to complain." Mrs. Parkle took out her handkerchief to show that she was going to cry.

"Look here, now, let's have no more of this. It's no good your working yourself into a state in order to find out anything. I'll tell you fast enough, but not if you begin to snivel. First you try

to bounce it over a fellow, and then you go on the injured tack."

Mrs. Parkle remained a picture of patience and uttered not a word.

"Because Miss Medlicott orders goods from me instead of writing to the firm, you needs must think there is something extraordinary about her. She saw me in our lavender patch one day and asked me about it, and, as you know, she has ordered lavender water repeatedly. I showed her how to make a *pot-pourri* with her rose-leaves when I was down last month, and now she writes word she would like to make some elder-flower water. Jordan, the gardener, always gives me a bed when I go there, so that I get amply paid for my information, do you see, while, as for Miss Medlicott herself, if you want to know, she is a young and handsome lady, who keeps

her carriage and has a fortune of her own."

Job meant to make the most of his story while he was about it, and had taken the liberty of magnifying a pony-chaise and throwing in the fortune on his own responsibility.

"She lives at that place, near our land, does she?" asked Mrs. Parkle.

"Yes, at Lanthradyne Manor," returned Job, briefly.

"Then she is not *so* very rich—I mean it is not a large property?"

"Isn't it!"

"But does it all belong to her?"

Job was in a dilemma. The fact was, so far as he knew, the estate was not Miss Medlicott's at all. She lived at Dalebrook with a married sister and her family, and because Job had heard that a certain little pony-chaise that rattled

about the village was Miss Medlicott's property, he had hazarded the above statement. However, it was just as easy for him to represent the lady rich as poor, and hence he decided to be magnanimous. So Mrs. Parkle was treated to a long account of the lady's possessions, which was all the longer by reason of Job's mistress taking a deep interest in the account.

"There! now you know as much as I do about it; and I'll pack these things ready for to-morrow."

Job deemed it best to cut short the story, lest by any further questioning he might be tempted out of his depth. He went into the back of the shop and returned with a canvas haversack, in which he stowed away the bottles of lavender water and some small packages he had been making up.

"You'll have to mind those bottles," said Mrs. Parkle, watching him.

"Oh, I'll take care of them, never fear."

"I doubt you will."

Job gave his mistress a sharp look, and muttered something about "At it again," but Mrs. Parkle had resumed her sewing, and took no further notice.

"You had best give me my money now," said Job. "I shall be up and away by five o'clock, for there'll be no walking in this heat."

"When will you be back?"

"Not before Saturday; it may be Sunday night."

Mrs. Parkle slowly desisted from her work, and, with many "Ahs" and "Deary mes," proceeded wearily upstairs to fetch the money. Job's work being done, he placed his stool nearer the street door,

and took out his pipe with the air of a man who had to do a spell of waiting. He hoisted his thick-set figure upon the stool, deliberately filled his pipe and lighted it. In his cool attire, ensconced out of reach of the baking sun, he enjoyed the warm weather without much inconvenience. There was, at any rate, some air stirring in the passage, and the bundles of herbs swinging bower-like overhead had fragrance enough to overcome the noisome odours of the street.

Job had been in the employment of Parkle and Co. ever since he could remember. As a boy he used to accompany Mr. Parkle in his country excursions in search of herbs and simples, and although in later times the cultivation in gardens of many drugs had rendered unnecessary to a great extent such long rambles, his experience was still frequently of use in

the collection of rare plants. Parkle and Co. had a reputation still among druggists; but had it not been for Job's skill in the preparation of lavender and other waters—supplied to the trade, for Parkle did little retail business—it is questionable whether the firm would have outlived its originator. Job had been so successful, indeed, lately with his lavender preparation that the firm had been able to acquire a bit of land near Dalebrook for its cultivation. Still, his scanty wages were the same as they had been twenty years ago, except that they were more grudgingly paid, for every day Mrs. Parkle was more loath to part with her money. It was this, more than anything else, which accounted for Job's plainness of speech towards his mistress.

At the present moment Job's thoughts were confined to this subject of wages,

and in debating how long it would be before the necessary funds for his journey were forthcoming. As it happened, he had to wait a full hour before Mrs. Parkle made her appearance, and, after much hesitation, laid the sum of five shillings upon the counter.

Job, although perfectly aware of the return of his mistress, continued to suck away at his pipe. It was only when he heard the sound of money on the counter that he withdrew the brier-root stem for a moment and looked round.

"That's not no good to me—not five shillings."

Then he resumed his pipe as before, and looked into the street again.

Mrs. Parkle had gone back to her work-basket, but nevertheless seemed quite prepared for Job's behaviour.

"Isn't it enough, Job? Dear me! it's

nothing but money, money all day! How much do you want?"

"You know."

"Well—but, Job, your journeys are always costing money, you know. There is really no end to expenses. Well, there!"

Here another shilling was released from the bony fingers, causing Job's head to turn as before.

"Won't do."

"Well—but, Job, really you know——"

"Look here, missus. I shall be away four days—may be five. At three shillings a day that's twelve, and I'll take not a farthing less."

"Twelve shillings! Dear, dear! Twelve shillings!"

Mrs. Parkle proceeded with her ejaculations, but Job replied no more to them. He simply turned his head every time an

addition was made to the heap, but otherwise made no movement save to refill his pipe when necessary. Very slowly did the sum rise towards the specified amount, the old lady taking the journey to and from her work-basket with every addition of a shilling.

As Job knew perfectly well, she had come down provided with the whole amount, but had not courage enough to part with it. When the twelfth shilling was paid down, Mrs. Parkle stood by the heap while Job put it into his pocket.

"I want half a stale loaf and a bit of cold bacon in my bag, remember. Last time you forgot the bacon. I shall forget to pay in an account one of these days if it occurs again."

And Job, after beating out his pipe, gave a significant nod, and went upstairs with his haversack.

CHAPTER II.

TWO TRAMPS.

HART Street was a pleasanter place in the early morning, and when Job unbolted the door of No. 3 his face was gladdened by a puff of cool fresh air. He was ready dressed for his journey, and put the door wide open to lighten the shop. Then he went back into the stuffy atmosphere to seek his haversack, and make sure that it contained the cold bacon of which he had spoken to Mrs. Parkle. It was there, and though Job grumbled at the smallness of the parcel, he was in too great a hurry to delay on that account. A half-quartern

loaf was there, too, and he hastily tore off a portion, to be consumed with a draught of milk from the first milkseller he should meet.

The haversack was thrown over one shoulder and a canvas bag over the other, to contain any herbal treasures he might collect, and then he reached a stick from one of the dark corners of the shop. It was of stout hazel wood, and, by way of handle, had a small hammer on one side and a steel pick on the other. His cap was of the old-fashioned school-boy type, with a huge leather peak, and this Job pulled down determinedly over his brow as a last preliminary to starting.

He closed the door after him with a loud slam, as if desirous of giving a parting protest of his determination not to be sat upon.

“I’ll learn her. Why, I’d never get

no wages unless I laid in wait for every customer who paid a bill—the old she-cat !”

The weather soon put Job into good humour again. The street was as untidy as ever ; bits of paper and straw littered the pavement, and were all the more conspicuous because the closely shuttered houses on either side seemed to shut them into the road by themselves. The puddle of beer in front of the public-house was dry, but none the less visible, and a smashed wine-bottle lay in the gutter before the door. But Job heeded none of these things. The air was crisp and clear, and that was enough for him.

A faint gleam of sunshine, all rosy and golden, made him so lighthearted he could scarce refrain from running down the street like a school-boy. The murky yellowness would come later with the

heat and oppression, when he would be far away in the open country. As yet the atmosphere was quite blue and transparent, and you could see shops and sign-boards with vivid distinctness.

Job got his sup of milk near the Angel at Islington, and sat down on a convenient doorstep to munch his bread and watch the milk-vendor go through a series of decanting operations, which seem inherent to the supply of pure milk. The latter refused Job's invitation to enter into conversation, and presently wheeled off his carriage and cans to continue the mystic process where he should be more free from observation.

The fine weather put Job in high spirits, and before he had well finished his breakfast he was standing, watch in hand, deliberating over distances.

"Ten minutes past five; that will

make it half-past eight by the time I get to Eltham Church. Now then, are you ready to start, old fellow? Bag hangs right? yes, and so are the straps. Forward! Quick march!"

Although Job gave the word to himself to "Quick March!" his pace was not a fast one—not more than three miles an hour, probably. There were no omnibuses on the route so early; but if there had been, he was too orthodox a pedestrian to have availed himself of them. For the same reason he objected to a lift upon a country road. Having once resolved on a foot journey, it was difficult to shake Job's determination.

Over London Bridge went Job, never slackening or increasing his pace, and on by the Old Kent Road towards Blackheath. It was only when the shops had given way to detached houses, and these

were succeeded by green hedges, that the stolid pedestrian began to show signs of animation. Now and then he paused to rub his hands together, and to look back at the city he was leaving behind him.

Job's destination was a spot in Kent near the Sussex border—a two days' journey on foot—and he usually passed the first night at Wrotham, as nearly as possible half-way between London and Dalebrook. Since Mrs. Parkle had rented a piece of land there Job made the journey many times in the course of the year, and the district had become familiar to him.

At Eltham Job took his first rest, and made a hearty meal of bread and bacon. A green bank by the roadside was chosen in preference to the tap-room of an inn, for although Job liked his pipe, he had no love for the smell of stale

tobacco. Moreover, he could lie here on his back for an hour or so, unfettered and undisturbed, as he best chose.

Now that he was fairly in the country and among the green trees, he took the stages more quietly. He halted by hedge or ditch to look after some strange bird or rare plant. On one occasion a little cluster of flowers caught his eye on the further side of a low wall, and these were so attractive that in a moment Job had put out pipe, thrown down haversack, and was digging away at the roots with a will. Every plant was carefully taken up with a lump of mould, and this neatly balled by the hand before being placed in the canvas bag.

Job was diligently pursuing this work when he became aware that a stranger was resting his arms upon the wall and looking on. A fair beard and a pair of

blue eyes were the main features of this stranger, who was indolently smoking and following Job's skilful movements with deep interest.

"All right, don't mind me; go it."

"This field don't belong to you, I suppose?" said Job, pausing doubtfully.

"Oh, dear no; I wish it did."

"You wouldn't let me do this, I suppose, if it was yours?"

"I hardly know, I'm sure. If you liked doing it I think I shouldn't mind." This with the pipe still between his teeth.

Job scarcely knew what to make of the gentleman and his style of conversation. However, as there were two or three more plants to grub up, Job went on with his work while the other smoked and looked on. Not until he had secured his treasures and scaled the wall and was

on his way once more did the new comer address him again.

“I say, what are those good for?”

“What do you mean?” said Job, turning round and half hesitating, lest the other should be making fun of him.

“I mean, what are you collecting them for? Are they for specimens, or are they for medicine, for instance? I mean, would they be any good, now, for rubbing into the small of your back to cure rheumatism; or to make tea with? If you are taking that road, perhaps you will let me walk with you?”

“Why, they are orchids—the bee orchid and the goat orchid they calls them in Kent. I have been looking about for this one, the *Hircina*, for a party that lives about here, and it is rather rare. Just look. It smells exactly like a goat, don't it?”

Job halted for a moment to let his companion inspect one of the plants, and the latter's enthusiasm quite pleased Job. He began to grow polite, which he rarely was to a stranger.

"You do not know botany, sir?"

"No; I'm afraid I don't." And the bearded face regarded Job curiously. Then as Job had returned his roots to the bag and appeared ready to start his companion proffered a huge tobacco-pouch.

"You had better fill before we go on. It's so much easier to talk with a pipe in your mouth."

Job did as he was desired, and presently they were marching gravely along the road again.

"Do you know botany?"

"Very little, sir. I read a bit now and then when I want to know something about a plant and where to find it. You

see we pick up our knowledge more in the hedges and ditches. That's better than poring over a book."

"You don't know 'Edward and his Mother,' then, I suppose?" asked Job's companion, after a pause.

Job nodded his head, and looked up at the blue eyes to see if they meant mischief.

"We used to call it that at school. It's a book, you know, in which Edward is always questioning his mother on botany, and we boys had to read all they said to one another. Edward's mother, I remember, was a great bore, and used to talk by the page on the slightest provocation. Edward had only himself to thank, though, for he brought it all upon himself by his questions. But with us it was different. I know we thought it precious hard to have to read

all about stamens and pistils when we had done nothing to deserve it."

"Then you never liked it?" asked Job.

"I don't think anybody likes things he is forced to learn. Perhaps that is why you enjoy botany now. You were not compelled to read it at school."

Job smiled. "At that rate I ought to like everything, for I never went to school. But you are joking, sir, I know. I should like to know now what you are really clever in."

"So should I," said Job's friend with sudden interest.

Job would have laughed only he feared to give umbrage. Here was a well-dressed gentleman, no longer a very young man, who had not yet found out what he could do. Job had so ardent a desire to learn more that he determined to question further.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but would you be offended if I asked——" Here Job hesitated.

"Go on; ask anything you like. I did not scruple to interrogate you, you know."

"I mean what you do for a living; for instance," continued Job, looking at his companion's perplexed face, "are you a lawyer?"

"Yes, I am; that is, I am a barrister-at-law."

"Oh!" said Job.

"But I can't get my living by it, I am sorry to say. No; they make you eat a lot of dinners before you become a barrister, but afterwards are not particular if you eat nothing at all."

Then, as this explanation did not quite satisfy Job, his travelling companion proceeded to show how a barrister without

practice was still at liberty to earn his living how he best could.

"Stay, here is my card, Mr. Job Hollings. I read your name from your haversack when it was lying on the wall, and now you know mine. If you have law business at any time, perhaps you will remember me."

"Mr. George Vanbrugh, Inner Temple," read Job slowly, aloud.

"That's right; now we are properly introduced."

Job smiled, and put away the card in his waistcoat pocket. For some time they marched on in silence. Then Job asked whether the country was familiar to his companion.

"No, it isn't," said the barrister. "And, what is more, it hardly seems worth knowing."

"It will improve as we get nearer

Wrotham, you will find; there is a fine view as we go down the hill."

Job instructed his friend to mount a footpath on the bank beside the road, to be ready for the first peep.

"Look over that hedge as soon as it is low enough, sir."

Presently the view burst upon George Vanbrugh. The whole county seemed at his feet. From the ridge on which he stood a weald of brown woods and green undulating hills could be seen for miles, while the fields below were like patchwork. The sun still shone faintly, setting in a cloud of golden vapour.

"You might almost see Sevenoaks, to the right there, if that violet haze did not veil it," said Job.

"And what is the green-clad hill opposite?"

"Those are the Merryworth woods,

and right across lies Watlington on the green banks of the Medway, where you may pluck cowslips and blue forget-me-nots at every step. The Medway is a lazy river at all times, but down there it hardly cares to move at all when the sun shines, the meadow-land is so fresh and the woods so bowery."

"Why, Mr. Hollings, you are as enthusiastic as if you had been born here."

"I don't know," said Job. "I think a cockney appreciates the country more than a yokel."

"What is the road running under that chalk cliff for a while, and then entering the black clump of firs?"

"That is the Maidstone road," replied Job.

"And the little village down here, half hidden in green, with a square grey tower?"

"Wrotham, where we are going."

Both remained some minutes gazing on the scene and watching the glowing colours change as the sun sank into a lake of gold.

"We have seen the best of it," said Job. "We shall only be disappointed if we stop longer."

But Job's companion had grown sentimental, and was in no hurry to depart.

"In what direction does your road lie, Mr. Hollings?"

"Nearly due south, to a place called Dalebrook."

"Dalebrook, near Hawkhurst?" asked George Vanbrugh.

"Yes."

"And you walk there to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Then I will walk, too—that is, if you will let me. I generally like to travel by

myself, because I can think, and thinking suits me better than talking. But I should like a day's walk with you very much."

Job grinned, but, as his companion was quite serious, he gave it as his opinion that people may think too much at times.

"You are right, Mr. Hollings, and, do you know, I believe you have hit upon my failing."

"It makes you morose and vacillating like if you do it too much, sir; I know, because I've tried it. So I shall be very happy to give you my company, as far as I go, to Lanthradyne Manor."

"To Lanthradyne Manor—to Miss Medlicott's!"

Job unfastened his haversack, and gravely handed out a packet for Vanbrugh's inspection. The latter read the address, and gave it back again.

"Why, those orchids are for her, too," said Job.

"Really."

"I should not take so much trouble for many people," said Job.

"Do you know Miss Medlicott, then?" asked George Vanbrugh.

"Of course I do. Do you?"

"Yes; she is a sort of relation of mine."

Job did not look pleased.

"At any rate, we will go together," Job said. And the two companions walked down the hill.

CHAPTER III.

GEORGE VANBRUGH'S MENTOR.

THERE were no grounds for any suspicions that Job might harbour against George Vanbrugh. The latter was but telling the truth when he said Miss Medlicott was a relation. She was something besides. George had known the lady and her family from boyhood, and, what was more, he had been from time immemorial the husband designate of one of the Medlicott girls. Kate and Lucy Medlicott had been his playmates in youth, and their father was the only father he had ever known.

Again, George Vanbrugh had been

frank with Job in saying he was ignorant as to any clever points he possessed. He ought to have made a good start in life, no doubt, but it was very certain he had not done so. There was plenty of money for his education, and at twenty-three an income of more than five hundred a year passed into his hands. He had read for the bar and eaten his dinners, and would have been content to marry had this course seemed to him a wise one, but somehow years slipped by without altering his condition.

Some people said it was George's good fortune in having a tolerable income of his own which stood in the way of his advancing himself in the world, and of this Vanbrugh was as well aware, probably, as anybody. He had studied law a little, written a little, and smoked a good deal, but had never earned a penny-piece by

his exertions. Not that Vanbrugh was altogether lazy. He had a method of passing his time, but the greater part of his leisure indoors was spent in playing the piano. Yes, he ought not to forget that point when questioned about his abilities—he was something of a musician. He had, at one time, indeed, seriously contemplated playing for an income, and went so far as to get an introduction to Mr. Cornelius Strick, the conductor at the Comus Theatre in the Strand. But a few words' conversation with that gentleman so convinced George that he should only be taking "the bread out of some poor devil's mouth," that the idea was at once abandoned.

George would have married ere this had he been quite satisfied with himself. There was Lucy Medlicott ready to say "Yes" at any time, just as Kate would

have done five years ago, before she married Ferdinand Malleliou. He always liked Lucy the best, and her sister's marriage, George persuaded himself, made matters easier for him. At the same time, Kate had been very good to him. At Christmas he went down to pass the holidays with the Medlicotts in Yorkshire, and in May or June father and daughters came up to town for a fortnight and put themselves under George's care. At least, this had been the rule as long as Mr. Medlicott was alive and Kate was unmarried; but during the past year or so, while they had lived at Lanthradyn, George had seen his old friends less frequently, and on both sides there was less cordiality than in the old days.

George Vanbrugh had determined this should not be. It was his fault, if any one's. So he decided to go over to

Lanthradyné at once—Lucy had lived there for a twelvemonth now without a single visit from him—and, repairing the wrong he had inflicted, he would ask her to be his wife without more ado. His income, added to hers, would suffice for their wants, or rather it would have to do so. He was so very close to thirty now, that if he tarried longer he might never get a wife at all. At any rate, if he wanted to pick and choose, there was not much time before him.

Besides, as George himself conceded, “he had had his fling,” and might well be content to marry now. He had travelled half over Europe at one time or another, he had subscribed for a stall at the opera for the past half-dozen seasons, and he had partaken of little convivial dinners at club or chambers in the company of London lions of all degrees.

Vanbrugh had but the loan of a door-post whereon to affix his name in the Inner Temple; he lived in comfortable chambers in Spring Gardens, whence the verdure and sunshine in St. James's Park were visible at times. In early summer, when the trees had just burst into leaf, and foliage and grass were fresh and green, there were not pleasanter rooms in all London than George Vanbrugh's; and at other times a large fern-case, made to fit the sitting-room window exactly, afforded a peep of delicate greenery so dear to every Londoner's heart. Here were George's favourite books and his piano; here, too, were luxurious basket chairs, and racks of pipes to be smoked under varied circumstances, according to the position of the smoker. Here were comfortable settees on which you might sit cross-legged if

you chose, and red-cased cushions, with gay knitted bolsters, to recline upon. A Turkey carpet of many colours covered the floor, and handy little tables and brackets of bright walnut wood were not wanting upon which to rest a cup, or glass, or pipe, or book. Only one thing was necessary to appreciate George Vanbrugh's divan, and that was a liking for smoke. The heavy hangings which shut off the sleeping apartment—a kind of alcove—and the bright-coloured cushions everywhere all smelt sadly of tobacco.

George loved nothing more than to ask a few friends from the club after dinner to coffee and cigars in his rooms, while he, pipe in mouth, played to them whatever they might please to command. A sonata of Beethoven or a waltz of Gung'l came just as readily from his supple fingers, and much as his friends might

enjoy the music, it seemed to give George most pleasure. His instrument had grown to be part of himself; it gave him back every sympathetic touch, and there was more feeling in its voice, he thought, than he had ever heard from living creature.

But George had decided that the time was come to put an end to this useless life. Ned Shorter, who was part proprietor of the room outside which George's name figured in the Temple, had made a start at the Old Bailey and in the Police Courts, and now wanted the place to himself. Not that his partner had not hitherto permitted Shorter full possession. They paid an equal share of the rent, or rather had done so since Mr. Edward Shorter was able to find the money, and George good-naturedly permitted his friend to

occupy the place as the latter pleased. In return, Shorter undertook to see to any business of George's, and to answer questions in his absence—duties, it must be confessed, that were not onerous.

Shorter's proposal to dissolve partnership was an element in the resolution which George Vanbrugh had recently formed. They were still the best of friends—indeed, it would have been difficult to quarrel with Ned; but now the latter was able to take care of himself he did not wish that Vanbrugh should still go on good-humouredly paying for the rooms.

“You see, old fellow, I get more of a pull than ever since I have been doing this criminal business. If it's any convenience to you to keep your name on the door you are quite welcome, but as I want the rooms for work I shall pay for them in future.”

George protested that he might want them, too, one of these days, when he began to practice, but Shorter only shook his head.

"When you do, you shall have them, old man. In the mean time I pay the rent."

"But what am I to do?" was George's feeble answer.

"Do; why, what you should have done years ago. Marry Lucy Medlicott and live happy ever after."

Thus the partnership was dissolved, and thus in great measure had George's visit to Lanthradyme come about. The two young barristers had been so long connected that some energetic measure on George's part was necessary. Although Mr. Edward Shorter had not said so, it was apparent that his success at the bar depended in great measure upon their

severance. Shorter had essayed many ways of getting a living, for he had no competence to fall back upon. If you only try a lot of things, was his maxim, you are sure to turn up a trump at some time or other. He had turned up the lucky card while reporting at a Police Court. He had done "lining" for newspapers, "science gossip" for magazines, and once wrote a successful farce, which ran for nearly three months at the Comus Theatre, during which memorable period Mr. Shorter drew five shillings a night as author's rights.

It was at this particular stage of Mr. Shorter's career that George bethought himself of earning something as a musician, and had that interview with Mr. Strick, the conductor. And, subsequently, when Ned endeavoured to follow up his dramatic success with a three-act comedy, George

set to work upon a novel ; but neither play nor story were ever communicated to the public.

George fell back on his piano playing, and Mr. Edward Shorter relapsed once more into a reporter. But fortune favoured the latter again, and this time he managed to cling to the fickle dame's skirts. A man appeared before the magistrate at Vere Street Police Court charged with being concerned in some betting transactions. Shorter, who was reporting the case, noted the facts as usual, and observing there was a legal flaw in the evidence and that the accused was undefended, quickly closed his notebook, and, without more ado, rose and defended the fellow. He was remanded, and on the next occasion appeared at the bar with several accomplices, who placed their case in the young barrister's hands.

The men were committed for trial at the Old Bailey, and here again Shorter cleverly defended them, and, although in the end a conviction was secured, the energetic junior had made a name. Other criminal practice came in, and "Mr. Edward Shorter appeared for the prisoner" was an announcement frequently to be seen in the daily papers.

Vanbrugh, anxious to do as his friend had done, at once proposed to take over the reporter's note-book, and similarly to watch for an opportunity. But his partner soon laughed him out of the notion, and George went home to his piano in Spring Gardens instead.

He had always taken Ned's advice, and the last suggestion to go down to Lanthradyne and marry his cousin Lucy he no less determined to act upon. When it came to starting upon the expedition,

however, George felt nervous. He packed a huge portmanteau, and wrote a note to Mrs. Mallelieu apprising her of his intended visit. But the note was never sent off, nor the portmanteau strapped down. It was such fine weather, and the country through which one passed was reputed so charming, that a walk would be delightful. He could carry a sling bag over his shoulder, and thus come upon them unawares. They might not be able to accommodate him for more than a night, or worse still, might not care for his company after all. He would be so much better able to reconnoitre and to find out how matters looked if he walked over in an unpretending fashion; indeed, he could be off again without difficulty in case he should find he was not wanted.

Such were the reasons George found

for walking over to Dalebrook. Of course the truth was he was a coward, and desired to put off the affair as long as possible. As he sat munching his dry toast at breakfast that morning, how he wished he had not made a bargain with Mr. Job Hollings to walk in company. He might have shammed sickness, and excused himself through the waiter when his travelling companion called and inquired for him, only it was too late now. Through the wire blind of the coffee-room he had seen Job pass and repass several times, and no one could doubt but that the latter had been asking after George Vanbrugh.

George sent the waiter for more toast, and when the latter returned, he said—

“Beg pardon, sir, but there’s somebody——”

“Waiting for me, eh? Ah, well, I

shall be ready in ten minutes. Bring me the bill, will you ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And, waiter, just ask him if he will have a cup of coffee before starting.”

“ Yes, sir.”

George was already half an hour after the time agreed upon. He did not particularly care about getting to his destination before dusk, and would have been glad of a still longer delay. But Job had no intention of granting it, and sent a surly message by the waiter that he had taken breakfast an hour ago, and wanted to be off at once.

There was consequently no respite. Vanbrugh paid his bill, assumed his travelling bag, and joined Job, whom he found restlessly prodding holes in the bank a few yards down the road.

“ Good morning,” said George.

"Good morning. You have been keeping me long enough."

"You said half-past seven, I think. Did you not?" said George, referring to his watch.

"I did; and it is past eight now."

Vanbrugh expressed regret, but it was some time before Job forgave him. The fresh morning air, the green hedgerows, and the white, hard road along which they tramped did more to restore Job's equanimity than George Vanbrugh's contrition. An attempt on the part of George to bring about friendly relations again, proved, indeed, altogether abortive, for he only invoked his companion's ire the more by calling a violet flowering bine in the hedge the deadly nightshade, and asking to what use the poisonous thing was put in medicine.

"That's the *Dulcamara*. Everybody

calls it a poison, but it isn't. Why, you might make the berries into jam and eat it, if you liked, without harm."

Vanbrugh grew interested, but Job did not mean to let him off.

"It's a common error to confound that with the Belladonna, which is no creeper at all, and has berries the shape and size of a cherry. The reason is because people will call the Dulcamara the woody nightshade instead of Bitter-sweet, which is a much better name."

George simply replied with an expressive nod. He had no wish to deliver himself further into the hands of the enemy by any more incautious observations, nor did he desire a lecture on botany. His school-boy reminiscences of "Edward and his Mother" were too strong within him for that.

"We shall get to Dalebrook village

some time in the afternoon, I suppose, if we walk on at this rate ? ”

“ Yes,” said Job, recovering his good humour a bit. “ You said you were not clever at anything yesterday, but you are evidently a good walker.”

“ Am I ? Unfortunately it is hardly an occupation by which one can earn a living.”

“ Do you mean to tell me,” said Job, who had evidently been thinking over their recent conversation, “ that any gentleman who has had a good education cannot earn a livelihood ? ”

“ I can only say that I have not been able to do so, Mr. Hollings ; but then it may be my fault. As it is with botany, it may be with the rest, you know. Perhaps I am more stupid than other people. I have never tried to earn anything as a pedestrian, but I have essayed most other things.”

"And now, I suppose, you don't know what to try next?" said Job.

George got out his tobacco-pouch and began to fill his pipe with some energy. He was going to try something else—marriage—but he did not care to make Mr. Hollings a confidant of his plans. He handed the pouch to his companion, saying, "Well, perhaps you can give me a hint?"

They halted for a moment to light their pipes, and George hoped this operation might divert the conversation. But Job was not to be denied; it was a talk that interested him.

"Then your going to Lanthradyne has nothing to do with any plan?"

"Confound the man," thought George, "for his impudence." Without taking his pipe from his mouth he answered with a brief "No."

"I don't want to give offence, sir, but you asked me my business yesterday, and so I thought I might do the same by you. I told you where I was going and what was my errand. I want to say something else now, but hardly know how to."

"Well, what is it?" said George, rather pettishly. It seemed as if both men were thinking of the same subject, and that they were equally afraid of alluding to it.

"I told you yesterday," said poor Job, trying to keep up with George's hurried pace, "that I was carrying a parcel for Miss Medicott, of Lanthradyn. I have known Miss Medicott for a long time, now, and am as much interested in her welfare as any one alive can be. I ought not to say this, I know; and I hope she will never learn as I have mentioned her

name. But somehow, sir, it has got into my head that you are going down to Dalebrook to marry her."

"Well."

Job was so much out of breath he could scarcely proceed.

"If it is so, sir, I hope you may make her a good husband. She has been the bright star of my existence so long, that I cannot believe any man to be worthy of her. Do not think that I rate you low, sir, because you pretend to know nothing. I am sure you are not less clever, but only more modest, than other people. But I trust you will value Miss Medlicott at her true worth."

If George had ever meant to be angry with the short, shabby little figure attired in rusty black which was shambling at his side, the idea disappeared when he saw Job's pale face looking straight into the distance.



There was a rising in George's throat that prevented him from speaking, but he placed his hand on Job's shoulder, and this answered the purpose as well.

"There, you can just catch sight of the village from here," said Job, pulling up at the top of the hill. "And if the sun did not shine into one's eyes so, you could see the house too, by that cluster of brown wood."

Job shaded his eyes with one hand while he pointed with the other, but it was too hazy to see Lanthradyne Manor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADIES OF LANTHRADYNE.

LEST the reader should endow Lanthradyne Manor with undue importance, it may at once be stated that Miss Lucy Medicott's home was far from being grand or imposing. The house was a long one-storied edifice, of white exterior, and, although comfortable enough inside, as in the case of most old-fashioned dwellings, the ceilings were low and the walls irregular. Nor were the grounds of any extent. A trim lawn in front, and a garden and shrubbery behind, together

with two fields—not ten acres in all—comprised the property, which belonged equally to Mrs. Mallelieu and Lucy, and into which they had moved from Yorkshire mainly because Mr. Mallelieu wished to be nearer town.

There was a coach-house and a double-stalled stable, but Lucy's pony and chaise were the sole occupants. There were other things at Lanthradyne besides the pony which belonged to Lucy, for that young lady had come of age a twelve-month since, and into her little property as well. Kate's share was wanted in the maintenance of the household, so there were many purposes on which Lucy could spend her money with advantage.

Indeed, busy woman as she was, Mrs. Mallelieu had quite enough upon her hands. There was a dairy to look after and a poultry-yard, besides two robust

young rascals who were for ever being spoilt by auntie Lucy. These cares, however, made little impression upon the lady of the house. Though three years older than her sister, Kate was still as bright and handsome; and sitting alone, her tall, supple figure might well be mistaken for that of Lucy—an error all the more possible since the sisters usually dressed alike.

Between shrubbery and paddock was a garden-house, and here it was that George came upon his cousins. Job had pointed out a pathway along the margin of Mrs. Parkle's lavender plantation which led directly into the grounds. George shook hands warmly with his travelling companion and followed the route indicated. But he was as much startled to find the ladies so suddenly as they were at seeing him.

"Why, I declare, it's George!" cried Kate Mallelieu, throwing down her work and seizing George by the elbow. She would have kissed him, probably, if she had obeyed the impulse of the moment.

Lucy was not behindhand in her welcome.

"Why, where did you come from?" she said.

Each sister shook a hand vigorously in unfeigned delight, and thus any nervousness George might have felt soon vanished. They led him into the garden-house, and sat him down between them. Kate took off his hat and brushed his hair up over his forehead, while Lucy, still retaining a hand, looked on and laughed.

"And so you thought you would come down and have a look at us once more?" said Kate. "Upon my word,

you have been thinking long enough about it."

"But you never come up to town now," pleaded George.

"Yes, we do," said Lucy, "with Ferdinand."

"Now don't begin to tease, Lucy, or we shall lose him again."

"At any rate, I have not seen you for a twelvemonth," said George.

"Poor dear man!" said Lucy. "And whose fault is that, pray?"

"Lucy, be quiet, do! George, never mind her. Pray how did you come?"

"I walked."

"What, all the way from London?"

"Yes, all the way."

Lucy laughed, but her sister grew all the more serious.

"But where's your luggage? You are surely going to stop with us?"

"Yes. I was going to telegraph for it if I could stop," said George, with some hesitation in his voice.

"If you could stop!" emphasized Kate.
"You nasty, unkind thing!"

"Besides, you can't telegraph from here," said Lucy, still smiling. "The nearest station is four miles off, and Ferdinand has got the pony-chaise. Couldn't you walk there?"

"Yes, perhaps I had better," said George, growing nervous once more.

"And then you would never come back again," said Kate. "No, thank you. Lucy, take that bag away from him. We catch a friend so seldom down here that we cannot afford to lose one."

"And yet I walked down with a friend of Lucy's," said George, determined to punish that young lady if he could.

"A friend of mine?"

"Yes, from London."

"You mean poor Job. Oh, I'm so glad he has come," said Lucy; and then, to change the subject, she asked—

"And how is that funny friend of yours, George?"

George repeated to himself half aloud, "Funny friend?"

"Mr. Shorter, you know."

"Oh, Ned's all right, thank you. He sent you all sorts of kind messages."

"You might have walked him down, too, I think," said Lucy, to whom the notion of George having come on foot appeared excessively humorous.

"Thank you, I don't care to bring a rival with me when I come here."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Lucy.

"Never mind, George; we are glad to have you in any case," cried Kate. "Just scribble down your telegram on a piece of

paper, and I will send Jordan off with it at once."

George did as he was bid, and Mrs. Mallelien went off bearing his bag and the telegram.

"You men never think of giving one notice of your coming, and so you will have to wait till we get a room ready. Lucy will give you something to eat, for we shall not dine till half-past six."

George protested he was not hungry, so Lucy showed him the grounds instead. They were both more at ease walking about, for the conversation on either side had been anything but fluent. As long as there were poultry and pigs to look at, and kitchen and flower gardens, all went well, especially as Lucy begged George to smoke his pipe if he liked, a permission at once made use of.

George grew quite brisk and busy open-

ing gates and shutting doors, and once, when crossing a dirty yard, and Lucy's hands were engaged in holding up her skirts, he was fortunate enough to save that young lady from a bad tumble.

"I hope you did not hurt yourself?"

"No, not much; it's only a sudden twinge. My foot twisted, and—and——" Lucy held to the wooden palisade for support.

George looked down at a little white ankle that was withdrawn from the ground in pain. "If you will hold my pipe for a moment, I can carry you in."

"No, thank you; it's not so bad as that," said Lucy, smiling in spite of her hurt. "I shall be able to put my foot down directly."

"But why should you? Which is the way in—through that kitchen place?"

Lucy laughed outright, though her ankle still smarted.

“What are you thinking of, George? What would the servants say, do you think, if they saw a strange man carrying me about in his arms?”

“So far as I am concerned they might say anything they chose.”

But Lucy only shook her head, and looked down at her bad foot.

“Well, you will have my arm, at any rate?”

Lucy consented to this, and limped slowly off. She would not go indoors just then. She would go back to the garden-house again, and sit there for a while.

“I have a good mind to take you up and run, now we are in the shrubbery.”

“No, for goodness’ sake, don’t, George.”

Lucy was so frightened lest he should carry out the threat, that for the moment she held him fast at arm’s length.

"But why not, Lucy? I am strong enough. I shouldn't drop you."

"I know you wouldn't. But please don't. I shall go into hysterics with pain and laughter if you say any more. It will be all right if you let me lean on your arm."

George did not volunteer his carrying powers again, but led Lucy off as best he could in the manner directed. The poor girl was glad enough to sit down, and George insisted at once upon unlacing the dainty high-heeled shoe which had caused the mischief.

At another moment, perhaps, George Vanbrugh would have been more agitated over his task, and had not Lucy been sick with pain she would hardly have permitted it. But by the time she could protest the thing was done.

"How dare you, George!"

George Vanbrugh had the old-fashioned little shoe in his hand, and it was because he did not put it down, but felt and fondled it, that Lucy called out.

“It is not the first time, Lucy; only in those days I remember there was but a tiny strap and a black button to fasten. I fastened that button many a time for you.”

Lucy smiled in spite of herself.

“This is quaint and pretty enough, but I liked the little shoe better, and the white socks that had to be pulled up after every run.”

“Did you, indeed! And what if I said I liked your round jacket and table-cloth collars?”

“You don’t remember them, Lucy?”

“I do perfectly. We were but talking of you the other day, and Kate was astonished how much I remembered.”

"You girls never forget anything, I believe, except," said George, with a gulp, "when a fellow's been unkind to you."

"But you never were unkind to me."

"But to Kate."

"If you were, she has forgiven you long ago, I know. See how she welcomed you here this afternoon. Now put down that shoe of mine, or give it me."

George had an idea for the moment that he could retain it as a keepsake, for he was some time in obeying Lucy's request. He relinquished it at last, and then pulled out a flamingo-coloured handkerchief of soft silk, which he proceeded to fold up carefully on one of the seats.

"What is that red thing for?"

"To wrap your foot in while I get you a slipper."

"What nonsense, George." And Lucy

involuntarily drew her foot further under her skirt.

"But you will catch cold with nothing on."

"Give me my shoe, then."

"But your foot is too much swollen, really," said George, in all seriousness.

"I won't hurt you, I assure you."

So Lucy had perforce to let him wind his soft handkerchief about the wounded limb, George's hands trembling a good deal in the operation.

"Thank you very much."

"I think it is I who should thank you," said George, laughing now it was all over. "There ; now where shall I find Kate?"

"Do put that down, George. You will only dirty your fingers." For George had taken up the high-heeled shoe again, and was caressing it.

George was fain to obey.

"Give me another ten minutes' rest, and then I think I shall be able to walk."

"You may rest as long as you like, but I shan't let you walk indoors with a sprained foot," said George, sitting down beside his cousin.

"Kate will be wondering where we are."

"Shall I carry you in, then?"

"No, certainly not!"

Lucy was determined on this point, so George did not press it. Now that they were quietly talking together again his old nervousness came up once more. His hands had nothing to do, for Lucy had possessed herself of the shoe, and kept it by her.

"When are you coming to town again?" asked George, presently.

"I hardly know; Kate and Ferdinand

were in London a fortnight ago, but only for a couple of days. I do not care for town very much."

"You and Kate used to enjoy yourselves once on a time."

"Yes, and we must have worried your life out, I am sure, for you took us everywhere. But I feel I have no desire to see Madame Tussaud's over and over again, and I would not say 'Thank you' if I could go to a theatre to-morrow."

"Why, Lucy, that's just what I might have said, but not you. Don't you really care for town?"

"I like the country better."

"But what do you do all day long?"

"I could hardly enumerate my occupations; but pray what do you do?"

"I?"

"Ay!" cried Lucy, with just the least touch of asperity in her voice.

George was arraigned. In a moment he thought of the many feeble efforts he had made, of the countless waverings of his life. He had felt for a long time past there was something between him and his cousins ; he now knew what it was. Had he taken the pains to think before he would, no doubt, have readily discovered it. What had he done for the past few years ? ”

“ I am a barrister, as you know, Lucy, and I have been waiting for work,” was his answer.

“ And you have been living on your income the while ? ”

“ Yes, Lucy.”

“ And suppose you had no income, no money of your father’s to fall back upon ? ”

“ I should have starved,” said poor George.

"No, you would not; you would have worked, worked hard. You would have been a bee instead of one of the drones."

"Shorter's a bee, then," remarked George, half aloud.

"Do you remember your promises, George? Do you remember telling Kate all you meant to do when you were once a barrister? Do you remember how proud we were of our brother, and how he promised to give us each a silk gown when he wore one himself? I recollect, George, as if it were yesterday, your telling us about Queen's Counsel and Serjeants-at-Law, and Judges and Lord Chancellors. Kate and I have not had our silk dresses yet."

"But I will give them you, if you will only accept them," pleaded George.

"We could only accept them under that one condition, George."

"But, Lucy, every barrister cannot become a Queen's Counsel."

"Every barrister can try."

Poor George! he had better have deferred sending the telegram for his clothes. He had been quite right in his surmises; he was not wanted at Lanthradyn, and he ought not to have stopped. A younger man, or one of a more hasty temperament, might have resented Lucy's interference. Not so George. She spoke but the truth, and spoke it for his sake. Man of the world as he was, he would have liked to have fallen at her feet and to have kissed the rod that smote him.

"But I have done something, Lucy; I have tried many things. I am very sorry you are disappointed."

"We are disappointed very much. Kate says there is yet time, and is for

ever defending you. Of that you know best."

George did know. There was no means that occurred to him at that moment whereby he could earn a crust of bread.

"I will try, Lucy, if but for your sake."

"It is for your own sake ; to Kate and me it is a matter of disappointment, but nothing more. You were once our knight, our hero in everything—at any rate, you were to Kate, if not to me. You were the standard by which we tested everybody. Was he as clever as George Vanbrugh ; was he a barrister like George Vanbrugh ; had he such a good position as George Vanbrugh ?" Lucy grew quite excited over her subject.

"I am very sorry, Lucy ; I never thought of all this. If I had, do you

know, I think it would have spurred me on."

"It would simply have made you vain to know what two foolish girls thought of you."

"Two girls in whose good opinion I would rather stand than in that of all the world."

"Two girls whom you have forgotten, whom you have not seen for a twelve-month."

"And you know why, Lucy. If I tell you I feel my failure as deeply as you do, the reason of my absence 'is not far to seek," said crestfallen George.

"Then why don't you ask Kate for advice? She would give you better counsel than your fine bachelor friends in town. Kate is a staid matron now, remember, who could and would tell you

what to do." Lucy felt she had been quite severe enough on the fashionable beau, and was glad to beat a retreat.

"I will ask Kate for advice."

"And follow it?"

"Yes," said George, smiling.

"You would have done better to have gone to her before. I mean——" Lucy blushed, as if she did not quite know what she did mean, and George himself reddened and looked down. "I mean you should have remembered that those who wish you well are always the best counsellors."

"I will remember it in future, believe me," said George, earnestly. "I will reform at once."

"Not before dinner, I hope," cried Kate, bustling up at the moment; "you are quite late enough as it is. Why,

what have you two been about all this while?"

And then, with two poles and a chair, the cousins carried Lucy between them, Guy Fawkes fashion, into the house.

CHAPTER V.

EVIL COMMUNICATIONS CORRUPT GOOD

MANNEERS.

"MR. JOB HOLLINGS would like to see you, miss," announced one of the servants next morning.

Lucy's ankle was still sufficiently tender to keep her on the sofa indoors. Job generally saw Miss Medicott on the lawn or in the garden; but as she was so long putting in an appearance, he had ventured to call at the house.

"I had quite forgotten Mr. Hollings; please ask him to come in at once, Jane."

Job made his appearance with a very doleful face, which Lucy did not understand until she found it was assumed out of sympathy for herself.

"Oh, it is not much, Mr. Hollings," said Lucy, smiling; "I was afraid something dreadful had befallen yourself."

"A stream of cold water is the best thing for a sprain, it puts the tendons right again; although with a little ankle like yours, miss, no bigger than my wrist, I wonder it has any strength at all."

"Oh, never mind my foot, Job; I dare say it will be all right again in two or three days. I find you have brought me some more lavender water; and let me see, can you give me that information about the elder flowers I wrote for?"

"Yes, miss, here is everything you want. I have nothing to do for a couple

of hours, and I should be glad to assist you."

"Thank you, Job, but I shall be a prisoner, I fear, for the next day or two. How do you think the lavender is looking? It seemed to me one mass of bloom. I'm afraid our people steal a good deal in looking after it for you."

This bit of news scarcely affected Job; on the contrary, he grinned. "I'll tell Mrs. Parkle," he said.

"But she will not be very pleased, Job."

"No, she won't; that's why I'll be particular about telling her. She thinks the stuff can get on by itself, and grumbles whenever I run down for a day or two."

"So you walked down with my cousin; how did you get on?"

"Very well, thank you, miss. I sup-

pose he has been laughing to you about me? He is a very nice gentleman."

"He would hardly be a very nice gentleman, Job, if he laughed at you behind your back. No, he did not do that, I can assure you. But it's very strange to think of two such different beings as you and George Vanbrugh making companions of one another."

"I think it odd, too, miss; but Mr. Vanbrugh was so affable, you don't know. He came upon me just as I was digging up those orchids for you. I don't laugh much," continued Job, "because I have very little to laugh at as a rule, but he made me smile very often, miss, along the road, asking questions, and pretending not to know anything."

"Will you have a glass of wine, Mr. Hollings? There is a decanter of sherry, if you will help yourself."

Job was about to refuse, but thought better of it. He looked queerly at the wine and then at his hostess.

"I should like a glass of wine, miss, if you would pour it out for me."

"Very good, Job. Bring the decanter here, and I will. I can hardly get up."

Job at once brought the decanter and a glass. Had he known better he would have taken the tray too. Lucy poured out the wine as well as she could, but Job did not hold the glass steadily, and a good deal was spilt in the operation. In the middle of the awkward business George appeared.

"Good morning, Mr. Hollings."

"Good morning, sir." Job conveyed decanter and glass to the table again, and then, as there was a pause, he thought he had better drink his wine.

"Your good health, miss; and yours,

too, sir; and may you both live long and happily."

"Thank you, Mr. Hollings," said George. Lucy did not reply to the compliment.

"There is only one thing more I wanted to mention. It is this." Job took a sovereign from his pocket as he spoke. "That little French gentleman gave it me, miss, yesterday afternoon. I would rather not have it."

"But why not, Job? That receipt you brought for his lameness is doing his leg a great deal of good, I know; and it is only fair you should benefit by your cure."

"But I would rather not take the money. I did it for you rather than for him, miss; and I like to feel I have done something without being paid. You do not know how much pleasure it gives

me to think over it." And Job's eyes glistened.

"If it really is so, Job, you shall have your way. Mr. Hollings means M. de Belleville, who dined with us yesterday."

"Why, you seem to be a universal benefactor about here, Mr. Hollings," said George, in a way that implied he was rather bored with that gentleman's presence, nevertheless. He had come in for a quiet chat, on Kate's suggestion, and did not care to find Job sipping a glass of wine and taking up time which was both precious to him and to Lucy.

"Yes, Mr. Hollings is a favourite at Lanthradyn. You should hear the children talk of him."

Job stood tasting his glass of sherry in the corner, but as the conversation grew too personal to be pleasant, he finished it

speedily at a gulp, and narrowly escaped choking himself.

"Will you take some more, Mr. Hollings?" asked Lucy.

"No, thank you, miss. I'm afraid some of this has gone the wrong way already. No, thank you," coughed Job. Then, after he had recovered breath, he asked once more if there were further commands for him.

"No, Mr. Hollings, thank you. I'll write, if I should want anything, to Hart Street."

Job made a profound bow and took his leave, placing the sovereign he had spoken of on the table before him. But George was not to benefit by Job's departure, for Lucy at once said that she must get to work to make some designs for the cover of the new magazine. There were many things George would have

liked to speak of besides himself—about the French neighbour, for instance, and of Job Hollings—but Lucy was not in the humour then, and made no secret of wishing to get rid of her companion.

“You, too, must have a lot of things to do, George; you have not been into the village yet and seen the shops. Get Ferdinand to go with you.”

“He is busy in the study, writing.”

“Well, perhaps you will see Kate somewhere about the——”

“Kate sent me in to you,” said George, eagerly.

“Did she, indeed; to get you off her hands, I suppose?”

“Yes,” smiled George.

“Then I can’t do with you,” pronounced Lucy. “You are like the truant
r 1 somebody to play with him.

You had better go and amuse the boys in the paddock."

"I shall be very glad."

"Ask them to show you Beauty and Blossom; you haven't seen the cows yet?"

"No, I haven't," said easy-going George.

Lucy, perhaps, scarcely meant what she said. All she desired was to get rid of George. But George liked nothing better than a romp with children, and, seeing that Miss Lucy was determined not to listen to him just then, he was quite ready to fall in with her other proposal.

"You are not offended, are you, George? You are so matter-of-fact, that I am never afraid of saying anything to you."

George turned and laughed.

"I am slow at most things, Lucy, and I hope taking offence may be one of them. But he would be a strange being indeed who got out of temper with a pretty cousin like mine." And then George hummed something about—

"Had you ever a cousin, Tom ?
Did your cousin happen to sing ?
Sisters, we've all by the dozen, Tom,
But a cousin's a different thing."

"What nonsense is that, pray ?"

"Something of Praed's. It has been put to music, and I will play it if you like." George wanted to open the piano forthwith, but Lucy comprehended the manœuvre. If he once sat down, there would be no getting free again.

So George was warned off, and away he went to find the younger members of the family. They were in the coach-house, playing about the shafts of the

pony-chaise. They, at any rate, appreciated his friendship, and, instead of looking at cows, all three amused themselves with George's pipe. Wat, who had just attained the dignity of two years, contented himself with opening and snapping the pipe case, while his three-year-old brother was permitted the tobacco-pouch to fill the pipe bowl.

The pipe was duly lighted, and all three sat down to watch the blue smoke curl up into the air.

"It does make you hot, doesn't it?" said the elder one, after watching the puffs from George's mouth for some time.

"Oh no," said George.

"Then why doesn't it? Smoke is fire, isn't it?" questioned the young philosopher.

George found it difficult to answer the question, and while he was still thinking

and smoking he was attacked from the other quarter.

“Who does you love best?” said Wat.

“I love Auntie Loo,” said the philosopher, for George was such a long time answering.

“And I does,” said Wat.

“And I does,” repeated George, gravely, taking the pipe from his mouth.

“’Cos she gives me sugar,” said Wat.
“Not with tea and breakfast, but always.”

As George did not give his reasons for liking Auntie Loo, they went on with the next subject, and this proved to be playing at being pony. George was pronounced a capital substitute for Diamond, but bargained he should have in his mouth no other bit than his pipe. The pony had first of all to put his masters into the chaise before taking his place in the shafts.

This was rather warm work, advancing and retiring in the coach-house while Wat and the philosopher—who hit very hard, notwithstanding his solemn face—plied the whip alternately, and shouted at the steed. How long the pony would have been driven in this merciless fashion goodness knows, if both boys had not suddenly called to be taken out.

“Make haste, uncle!”

“Twit, twit!” called No. 2; and no sooner were they on their feet than they scuttled behind the chaise to the back of the coach-house.

George, rubbing his back and very red with his exertions, did not comprehend what all this meant, till confronted by Kate.

“Why, what *is* all this noise?” asked Mrs. Mallelieu, her sleeves turned back and her hands floury from cake-making.

George looked guilty enough, standing there like the big awkward fellow that he was. If it had not been too late, he too would have followed his companions and crept under the chaise. He took off his hat and rubbed his forehead; then turned and bent down to see two pairs of pink legs standing close against the wall.

"It's your fault, George. The children do not make such a noise when you are not here. Ferdy, Wat, where are you?"

But the two young gentlemen, having offered up a victim in the person of George, did not care about expiating their sins any further, and declined to come forth.

"For goodness' sake, George, don't make such a din; you can hear it all over the house. Why didn't you go and talk with Lucy, as I bade you?"

"It was Lucy who sent me out here to play with the boys," pleaded George.

"But you need not have come. You men are so stupid. I suppose if a woman were to tell you she was dying of love for you, you would believe it?"

George considered for a moment; then he said with a grin, "Lucy wouldn't believe me, I suppose, if I told her I was dying for love of her?"

"No, I don't think she would, George. I'm afraid she would want some practical proof. I should recommend a more energetic course if you want to press your suit with her."

"If I only knew," commenced George, confidentially, "whether Lucy really did like me, Kate, I would not hesitate a moment."

"Then why not ask her? You are old enough and big enough, I'm sure!"

George reddened at the sally, which he certainly deserved. He had come to Lanthradynne for one sole object, as his cousin Kate knew well enough, and that object was as far off fulfilment as ever.

“It is not the biggest men who are the most plucky, Kate. Ned Shorter is always chaffing me about that. I know it’s very cowardly of me to ask, but—but could you——”

“No, thank you, George. I know what you are going to say. No, I have done all I can for you. I gave you an opportunity yesterday and another one to-day. A pretty thing, indeed, for you to ask me to be your go-between! Fie, George! you ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“Well, I am ; but I don’t see how that will help matters?” said George, biting his pipe stem.

"Nonsense! I have no patience with you. But I shall be risking my cakes on your account if I stop any longer. Now, pray be more quiet if you must romp together. You can enjoy yourselves just as well without making all that noise, surely!"

Mrs. Mallelieu hastened back to look after her pastry, and Vanbrugh sat down on one of the shafts.

"What did she say?" said the philosopher, who, with bated breath, was the first to venture forth.

"Mamma said we weren't to make so much noise," explained George.

"Did she scold you much?" he asked.

"No, only a little; but perhaps we had better not play at pony any more."

"No, we won't," said the philosopher.

Master Wat made a suggestion. To George it was hardly intelligible at first,

but by dint of the elder brother's explanation the matter was set out in the end. It was to the effect that Wat had heard George play the piano on the previous night, and the former would like now to go indoors and hear a repetition of the performance.

Accordingly they went off into the house, the philosopher leading the way, and the other two following hand in hand. George whispered not to go into Auntie Loo's apartment, so they went upstairs into the drawing-room, where he had played last night. It was a long journey, for Wat's chubby legs had both to be landed on one stair before they scaled another. But the exertion was fully compensated for. Wat rubbed his hands and hopped about in anticipation while George opened the piano, and when he began a lively gallop even the philo-

sopher's features unbent as he jigged about.

But George laughed louder than either of them as he saw the intoxicating effect of the music upon the legs and arms before him. He picked out all the merry notes, and made them chase one another over the piano, one tripping up the other in its rapid flight, and making a helter-skelter, out-of-breath-like game of it all, that no one could refrain from joining. George had the power of a magician over the children, which he exercised through the medium of the keys, and so surely as the latter grew too hilarious and excited to keep up any longer, the giddy downfall of Wat and his brother was certain to follow.

The boys only laughed the more as they picked themselves up and joined the giddy music again. George made the

notes go off in pairs and trip down the piano together; then they jingled into runs, and ran faster and faster, until it became a headlong race between them, the quick treble notes playing up their pranks and skylarking among the bass ones. The tones never tired, but only rattled the louder and more merrily as they went on. Sometimes they leapt in quaint, jerky steps down the keys, and when at the bottom hopped and jumped up again as nimbly and rapidly as if it were their first run. Or again, the lively spirited boys were so boisterous that the galop could not go fast enough for them, George's hands getting bewitched in their efforts to keep pace with it all.

George had just taken his foot off the loud pedal at the end of one of these breakneck flights when he became con-

scious of Kate standing at the open door, calling to him. She meant to be very serious, but George's performance upset her matronly dignity. Had he been wise he would have gone on with his playing, and then, perhaps, he would have seen his cousin drawn into the vortex, as her boys had been before her.

"Why, how can you, George, be so stupid? Look at those boys, do." Kate tried hard to keep from smiling. "And you are smoking your pipe in the drawing-room, too; what can you be thinking of?"

"It has gone out, Kate, through laughing. But I'm very sorry. I was led astray. It was your boys' fault this time; they brought me here and said I might play." George looked at the two little pinafores now standing in a line beside him, their hands behind their

backs, and their faces intent upon his explanation.

Kate was vanquished. She could not speak and keep her countenance at the same time, so she made good her retreat before the enemy, who, with a loud shout of victory, were soon engaged once more in lawless revelry.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW MAGAZINE.

GEORGE VANBRUGH'S visit to Lanthradyné turned out exceedingly well timed. He came most opportunely to give an opinion of a new literary scheme upon which Ferdinand Malleliou and M. de Belleville were at that moment engaged.

This was no other than the starting of a new magazine—the very magazine upon the designing of whose cover Lucy was already at work. It was to differ in one respect from other periodicals of the sort published in London. Instead of

being a town magazine, it was to be a country one. All those hitherto projected savoured of the streets and squares, and derived their names from some locality in town. M. de Belleville's idea—for it was his suggestion, and he found the money—was to start a magazine which should be redolent of rustic fragrance, and promise stories of country life with plenty of fresh air and sunshine about them. Half a dozen titles had already been suggested: "Green Leaves," "Wayside Flowers," "The Lilac Spray," and similar names were noted and submitted to George Vanbrugh's opinion.

George had a fit of nervousness for an hour when the plan was unfolded to him in confidence, and his advice anxiously awaited by the two schemers. He had so little experience of literary matters, that he asked over and over again to be

excused from giving a verdict. But "the little Frenchman," as Job termed him, pressed the more by reason of this diffidence on George's part. M. de Belleville had been *rédacteur-en-chef* of *L'Empire*, one of the Bonapartist papers, and had been an exile since the day emperor and newspaper simultaneously ceased to exist. No wonder George felt the responsibility of giving his opinion in the presence of such an experienced journalist.

"At any rate you can tell us," said Ferdinand Mallelieu, rather pettishly, "which name you would prefer if you were choosing a magazine yourself at the bookstall."

"Yes, that is what we want to know," cried M. de Belleville, who spoke English with fluency.

George considered further, and then

asked to have the titles read over once more. How devoutly he wished Kate or Lucy were present.

“Well, now!” said Ferdinand, impatiently.

“‘Green Leaves,’” ventured George; “or one of the others, perhaps, might sound better to some people.”

“They are all good, I think,” said the bright little Frenchman, rubbing his hands.

“So do I,” said George, anxious to agree.

Mr. Mallelieu was still disposed to be petulant with George for his indecision.

“I should have thought you would know more about things of this sort, Vanbrugh; barristers are usually well up in literary matters.”

“The truth is, I have never done much writing, you know. Now, Shorter could

help you at once ; and he would, too, if I asked him."

But neither Ferdinand nor M. de Belleville desired the importation of further councillors, so the matter dropped.

"Now about a novel. Have you settled whether you will have a serial?" asked Ferdinand.

"Yes, if we can get one. But writers want so much money. I suppose Mr. Vanbrugh here could not supply us with a novel?" said the polite Frenchman.

"Eh, Vanbrugh; do you know any one who would write for us?"

A thought occurred to George which made him blush to the roots of his hair.

"I wrote a novel once myself," he began, timidly.

"You, my dear sir! Why, that is charming!" cried M. de Belleville.

"Ah, but you don't know whether it

would suit you," said George, diffidently, as he thought of the many times his thumbbed and battered manuscript had gone to the publishers and come back again.

"Oh, I am not much afraid," cried the Frenchman, delighted. His partner was not so well pleased. Ferdinand Mallelieu was thinking, no doubt, that he could write quite as good a story as George Vanbrugh.

"And where is it—where is your story?" asked M. de Belleville.

George was so long thinking, that the question had to be repeated.

Where was the manuscript? Where? George could not, for the life of him, remember at the moment. It had been hawked about so many times, and besides it was a good two years since he came across it last. He remembered seeing

it, he thought, in a sort of locker, under the window-sill, where he kept twine and shoe-laces and stray papers. It should be there still, unless his wretched housekeeper had made away with it. If he found she had he would discharge her the moment he got back.

"The manuscript is at home," said George, pulling at his beard, and hardly knowing whether to take the affair seriously. "It is at home ; but the fact is, I——"

"You have already disposed of it, you mean?"

"No, I have not ; but somebody else may have done so," cried the author, going as near a laugh as he dared.

M. de Belleville smiled and winked.

"I see, I see ; you want to know what we are going to pay for the story before giving an answer. Quite right—quite

right. Well, we will make you an offer, only you must promise to let us have a sight of the story."

"Most willingly, when I can find it," conceded George.

"So far, so good," said the proprietor of the new magazine. "Now we will go on with the matter of the title and cover. Will you kindly pass those designs, Mr. Mallelieu?"

Ferdinand did as he was bid, and George looked over them carefully, one by one. They were Lucy's work, all of them, and that was sufficient to call forth George's warmest praises.

"Those titles have all been registered at Stationers' Hall," explained Ferdinand Mallelieu, with importance. "That secures them as our property."

"Does it?" said George, interested.

"Does it?—why, of course it does,

Vanbrugh! You ought to know that as a lawyer."

"Yes, yes, naturally."

"So that we can now take our time to select which we please."

M. de Belleville followed Ferdinand in the argument, and at the last said, "Perfectly," to show how much the matter was to his satisfaction.

George had become so far at his ease that he now volunteered a remark. "I say, you are quite right, you know, to get hold of a good title and design for the cover, for I have stood over a bookstall many a time, like a boy in front of a lollipop-shop, money in hand, ready to buy the most attractive thing I could see."

"Then you give us credit for some knowledge of human nature, eh, Mr. Vanbrugh?"

"For a great deal. I doubt if I should have thought of such things myself."

"Well, we had better get on, I think," said Mr. Mallelieu. "Here are two more printers' estimates I received this morning, and which I propose to put with the others for comparison."

"Perfectly!" cried M. de Belleville; "and I hope, if Mr. Vanbrugh stays here a few days longer, he will do me the pleasure of offering a word of advice on that subject."

"Really, I assure you, I know nothing of these matters," said George, his fingers once more nervously wandering to his chin.

"At any rate, Vanbrugh, you know as much as we do; we only ask your advice, nothing more."

"And in respect to an engraver, now, for engraving the design on the cover.

Mr. Mallelieu, have you written yet? A foreigner would be more used to the fine work we require ; he ought to be engaged at once."

Ferdinand had written to several, but they declined to travel down to Dalebrook to take instructions. Did M. de Belleville think this was necessary ?

"I ought to see the man, I think ; and I can hardly travel to London until my lameness is better. We must try again. Perhaps Mr. Vanbrugh can help us here."

"Not I!" said George, laughing.

Ferdinand did not at all like George's levity and cavalier mode of dealing with business matters.

"You might be serious for a moment, at any rate."

"I am very sorry ; I beg your pardon, I am sure. Only it is such a change for

me to be called upon for a business opinion in matters of which I am so grossly ignorant."

"Mr. Vanbrugh underrates himself altogether," put in the Frenchman. "It is because you know nothing of printing and publishing, my dear sir, that your opinion as one of the public is worth so much to us. When we come to read your novel, I dare say we shall find you can do something."

"I hope you may," said George, who was serious enough all of a sudden; "though if you wish for the success of your magazine I would, as a last bit of advice, warn you not to take the story."

"Thank you; but Mr. Malleliou and I shall do as we think proper." Whereupon M. de Belleville warmly shook George by the hand, and brought the council to an end. Ferdinand gathered up his papers,

each one neatly docketed and tied with red tape, and refused George Vanbrugh's offer of assistance in putting them away. George had been particularly vexatious in his remarks, and instead of taking it as an honour to have his counsel asked, had put as many difficulties as he could in the way. Fortunately, M. de Belleville was not to be shaken in his resolve, otherwise such talk as Vanbrugh's might have jeopardized the whole scheme.

This, Ferdinand gave his friend George clearly to understand at dinner that evening, when only the family party was present. As the son of a late Under-Secretary in the Board of Control, Sir Ferdinand Mallelieu, and himself for some time a member of the Civil Service, George's host considered himself a very great man indeed, and hence the disfavour with which he had regarded M.

de Belleville's frequent references to his friend Vanbrugh.

"What, has George been taken into the secret as well?" said Mrs. Mallelieu.

"George was asked his advice on one or two points by M. de Belleville," put in Ferdinand.

"Yes, that was all," was George's uncomfortable reply.

"And which name did you like best, George?" asked Lucy.

Here was a dilemma. George had already put his foot in it with Ferdinand, and did not care to run any further risk. He thought all the titles were good.

"This morning you preferred 'Green Leaves,' " said Ferdinand.

"Yes, I think I did."

Lucy and Kate laughed.

"Why, George, I'm afraid you would never make an editor," said Lucy.

"No, I'm afraid not."

"George is not to be editor," said Ferdinand, with some sarcasm. "He is to write the first serial for the magazine."

"George!" cried Kate and Lucy at a breath.

The barrister blushed again. "What nonsense, Ferdinand! Don't believe him, Kate."

"It's a fact, nevertheless. We are none of us clever enough to be novelists, it appears, except Vanbrugh. He has his story already written."

"But my story won't do. It is a very bad one. It has been rejected by every publisher in London, I give you my word," said the barrister, earnestly.

"But you have written a story, George, at any rate, and you never told us," cried Kate. "I am so delighted! You must let us all read it; you really must."

"Ah, that's just it!" cried George, reviving. "I don't know where it is; it's lost, thrown away, or gone to light the fire."

"Why, what a foolish fellow," said Kate, "after being at all the trouble of writing so much to throw it away! You don't mean what you say?"

"Of course he doesn't, Kate," said Lucy.

George never felt so hot and cold in his life. Here at last was something in which he had pleased the sisters. The novel might still be in the land of the living, he thought, with a throbbing heart. If not, that housekeeper of his should hear of it. And yet he knew well enough the writing was of no value. The best was to make a clean breast of it.

"But you see, Kate, you are all making a fuss about nothing at all. You remember Shorter's farce, which we all went to

see at the Comus Theatre in the Strand ? Poor Shorter thought after that success he was cut out for a dramatic author, and consequently went to work at a three-act comedy. I thought I was cut out for something too, but as neither of us could tell what, Shorter suggested my writing a story, and so I did."

"Well?" said Lucy, as George came to a pause and wiped his forehead.

"That's the end. We both finished drama and novel at the same time, and so long as Shorter troubled the managers I pestered the publishers. It was a bit too bad."

"The novel?" asked Kate, laughingly.

"No, I didn't mean that; I meant worrying the poor publishers. I was very glad when Shorter let me leave off, I can tell you."

Kate and Lucy laughed heartily, but

Ferdinand, as one who, by reason of his connection with an embryo magazine, was a man of letters already, took a more serious view of the matter.

“It strikes me, Vanbrugh, that the something which has stood in the way of your being successful is a lack of ambition.”

“But I wanted to succeed, Ferdinand—I really did; for I rather believe in books and that sort of thing. In fact, I would like to be an author very much, if I could spare the money to pay for publishing.”

“Authors don’t pay to have their books published, Vanbrugh. You really seem to know nothing about literature.”

“All the authors I knew did.”

“What nonsense, Vanbrugh! Do you suppose if I were to write a volume now, and take it to a publisher, that he would ask me to pay for the printing of it? I’m

sure he wouldn't." And Ferdinand Mal-
lelieu gave a sideward glance at a glass
case which contained much of his writing.

His host had waxed so warm that George
hardly liked to venture further. But
Lucy had no such scruples.

"You had better try, Ferdinand. You
might be more successful than George."

"I shall follow my own inclination in
the matter, thank you. I have quite
enough literary work at present to do
without writing speculative books. Why
do you put this sweet pudding on my
plate, Kate? You know I never touch it."

Lucy was particularly gracious that
evening. She pressed George to play
something for them on the piano, and sat
and listened beside him the while, instead
of occupying herself, as she had formerly
done, painting in a remote part of the
drawing-room. Kate was pleased to see

her sister pleased, and altogether it was the most agreeable evening George had spent at Lanthradyme.

It was only that same morning he had thought of cutting short his stay, but George's spirit revived at one bound under these favourable circumstances. Lucy's foot, which had been so bad at times she could not bear company, also took a turn for the better, and George and his cousins were once more the best of friends.

George's candle somehow went out that night as he was ascending the stairs, and he had to go back to the dining-room to beg another from Kate.

"Well," said Kate, "what is it?" She had lighted his candle again, but he still stood waiting.

"Would you advise my speaking to Lucy to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? Yes, if it is too late to-night. Good gracious, George! what a strange fellow you are. I'm sure Wat has more courage. Lucy will tell you plainly 'Yes' or 'No,' and will not keep you long in suspense. You are neither of you children, and ought to know your own minds by this time. If you had taken my advice you would have spoken as soon as you came down."

"I thought she seemed kinder this evening than usual," ventured the big, nervous man.

Kate shook her head. "I don't think she is to be influenced in the matter now. She has made up her mind already one way or another, and is not likely to change it."

"If I only knew!" said George, as he went upstairs pulling his red beard.

CHAPTER VII.

GEORGE VANBRUGH PUTS A QUESTION AND GETS AN ANSWER.

GEORGE VANBRUGH put down the candlestick on his dressing-table, and looked at himself in the toilet-glass. To say that he was heartily ashamed at his cowardice was but faintly to express his feelings. Shorter and he had spoken of this approaching marriage in a business-like manner, as something that was to come off as a matter of course ; and when poor Job awkwardly referred to the same subject, George had been particularly offended at that worthy's interference between his bride elect and himself.

What would be the opinion of his friends if Lucy refused him? Such a contingency never entered his mind previously to his arrival at Lanthradynne, but it had occurred to him very frequently since. Still, under any circumstances, it was best to know one's fate at once, though George could not but own he was afraid to bring the matter to the test. That Kate was also unusually anxious seemed pretty evident, but unfortunately for George there was nothing in Kate's manner to give him encouragement.

He had never before been conscious of such misgivings towards himself. In town George Vanbrugh was the most confident and independent of his fellows, and had some sort of reputation, in fact, as a wit and story-teller. By this time half of his London friends had been made acquainted with his approaching mar-

riage ; and yet, after all, he might be rejected. What was a fellow to do under such circumstances ?

It was more than George could tell, as he moodily sat down in an American chair and began to unfasten his sleeve-links. Should he make a bolt of it without asking Lucy at all ? No, that would never do. Kate, at any rate, would never forgive him ; and Ned Shorter, in all probability, would only send him back again.

“ If I’m to do it at all it must be done at once, or I shall run away,” said George, determinedly, starting to his feet again, and taking a turn up and down the room. “ What a pity a fellow can’t take gas during the operation, as when you have a tooth out.”

He resolved to think no more about the matter. He went to bed, slept

soundly, was rather more serious at breakfast than usual, and punctually at eleven o'clock knocked at the library door, where he knew Lucy was still at work with her magazine covers.

He gathered from Lucy's quick glance that she was perfectly aware of what he was going to say. She guessed what he wanted; at least George gave her credit for doing so.

For all that, the young lady exhibited no intention of playing into her cousin's hands.

"Now, you mustn't disturb me if you come in here, George. I have my hands full of work."

George's woebegone face was plainly asking for sympathy, but Lucy bent her eyes over her painting, and would not understand. His voice was too shaky to be trusted, so he had no alternative but

to go up to the table and put his hand upon hers.

“What is it? Mind, or you will make me smudge all this paint. Why, George, whatever is the matter with you?”

“May I sit down on the sofa here and tell you?”

“Yes, if you like; what is it?”

“Only you mustn’t go on painting the while. Look here, Lucy, I love you, and want you to be my wife. There, I have said it now—will you?”

“You have said it now, George,” laughed Lucy. “Why, you comical fellow! do you know I think poor Job Hollings was going to say the very same thing the other day when you came in and interrupted. In fact, it was hardly fair.”

“Do you think he was?” smiled George, for the moment interested in his quaint travelling companion.

"I certainly do. He walked straight up to me to ask me to pour him out a glass of wine, and his hand trembled so, he spilt half of it on the floor." And Lucy continued to laugh at the recollection of the incident.

"But you haven't answered me, Lucy," said George, after a pause.

"Do you want a more direct answer, then?"

George meant to say "Yes," but he could not get his lips to do it.

"I did not think you would ever ask me, George. I meant you to understand that I could never look upon you otherwise than as a cousin. I thought my conversation the other day would have led you to think this. You surely could never have supposed I would accept your hand?"

"I hoped in time you might think

better of me. When I tell you, Lucy, that there is no other woman in the wide world whom I love and esteem more than yourself, you will not refuse to listen to me, I am sure. You and Kate are my nearest and dearest relations."

"So near and so dear, George, that you do not come to see us once in a twelvemonth."

"I know I am very much to blame. I confessed as much the other day. But you will forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive. We are not close relations, and it is only natural, of course, with your engagements in London that you should see us but seldom."

"Lucy, Lucy, you are always severe on me; you know what my engagements are as well as I do. I confess to being a lazy fellow who has neglected his talents

and idled away his time—you know I do.” George was now standing up before Lucy with his hands stretched out imploringly.

“And under those circumstances you ask me to be your wife?”

“Yes,” said George, as well as he could. What else could he say?

“And how are we to live?”

“On my property and—and on yours—till I can earn something more.” George said this last with a great effort, and added, “Please don’t laugh, Lucy.”

Lucy had no inclination to laugh. At first she went on busily with her paint-brush without looking for a moment in the direction of George; but she soon put it down and took up a little handkerchief instead, which was rapidly raised to her eyes and then thrust into the pocket again.

“You say I am cruel, George, and you

think me a hundred times worse, but I can't help it. You have been frank with me, and I will be frank in return. How can I possibly believe in your love? Ask yourself how you have behaved to Kate and to me."

"Like a selfish scoundrel," said the big man, in all humility.

Lucy's handkerchief was in request for a moment, and then she resumed, still, however, without regarding George.

"We are women now, and I feel we ought to act as women. You ask me to be your wife, and to bring with me my little fortune to add to yours. I do not complain of your plain speech, but, on the contrary, thank you for it. But don't you think that what little I have, should go to benefit those who have cherished and befriended me rather than to one who is a comparative stranger? That is the

view I take, George, and for that reason I decline the honour you would have me accept."

George still stood where he was—his crestfallen features helped nothing, for Lucy was not looking at him; but she knew well what his motionless figure denoted.

"I am very, very sorry, George, believe me. I sincerely wish it were otherwise, for Kate's sake, if not for your own. Do not think I believe so badly of you because you have done nothing to advance yourself in life. If at this moment you were a judge I should have said the same."

"Will you give me another chance if I——"

"No, George," interrupted Lucy, looking at him for the first time.

"At any rate I may hope that you

will," cried George, with a bit of colour returning to his pale face.

"No," said Lucy, rising. "These must be our last words on the subject. It will only give me pain, and I know you will not respect my wish the less on that account. Please go now."

Lucy held out her hand to bring the meeting to a close, and George had no choice but to obey. He kissed and fondled the soft fingers as long as he dared, and then turned from the room without once looking back.

Lucy sat down on the sofa with her hands before her eyes. She had gone through the ordeal in the manner determined upon by herself. It was a hard task, but there was no alternative. She half hoped he would have taken offence at her hard words, but he had bowed and acknowledged the justice of his sentence without a murmur.

Perhaps this upset poor Lucy more than all the rest. Had he resented her action but for a moment, or made one effort to justify himself, Lucy would not have minded. She began to wonder how she could have been so heartless.

The door opened and some one entered. It was Kate. There was no need to make known the result of the interview. The two sisters were locked in one close embrace.

"Never mind, Trot; I wish it had been otherwise; but perhaps it is best so."

"I could not help it, Kate; he might have known it from the first."

"He did, I think, poor fellow! He was very diffident about his success."

"Do you think so, Kate? I am so glad," said Lucy, now making use of her handkerchief in much more leisurely fashion. "He'll soon forget all about it."

"No, he won't, Trot, any more than you will. I am sure he loves you dearly."

"He will forget one sister as easily as he forgot the other."

"Lucy!"

"It may be very wrong, Kate, but it is quite true. Do you suppose that these fine town gentlemen ever think seriously of a girl ten minutes together? He is up in his room at this moment parting his hair or trying on a new scarf."

"How can you talk so, Lucy! He is with Wat and Ferdy, playing with the pony-chaise in the coach-house."

"As he does all day."

"George is a good fellow, and I don't care who says the contrary. He is the best and kindest friend we ever had, and if he is not clever, he does not pretend to be."

"No, he is not clever, or they would

have published his novel." And then Lucy's spiteful fit broke down, and she sobbed hysterically on her sister's arm.

"Hush, hush! I know you were only saying things to vex me, Trot. It doesn't matter. I am not angry. Come, come, never mind, dear. You must put away your work for this morning, and lie down."

"He has treated us very badly, Kate," said Lucy, between her sobs, "and it is only right he should know it."

"Poor George!"

Lucy only answered with her tears.

"I think he likes you, Trot, and I am sure he would work hard at his profession now."

"It's no use, Kate. Please don't ask me any more."

Kate saw there was nothing to be gained by urging George's suit just then.

She must know first of all what had passed, and this she could find out best from George. So Lucy was comfortably tucked up in a shawl, and enjoined to lie down on the sofa for a nap. Kate would take care she was not disturbed.

Ferdy and Wat were sent for into the house, and by this ruse Mrs. Mallelieu obtained George to herself. She met the disconsolate lover as he came out of the shed putting on his coat after the severe equestrian labour to which he had been subjected by his playmates.

Kate was full of sympathy, for she was nearly as disappointed as George at the issue of affairs.

“I am very sorry for you, George.”

“Oh, it’s nothing; I don’t mind at all,” said George, rubbing his shoulder as he walked on beside Kate. “Only the philosopher will always hit twice in the

same place, because Auntie Loo says it's the only way to make the pony get on."

"How can you be so ridiculous, George?"

"Well, we enjoy ourselves very much."

"You are enough to provoke a saint. No wonder Lucy would have nothing to say to you if you talk such rubbish. No, don't go into the garden-house; let us go out through the fields."

"Then I'll put out my pipe as we are crossing the lavender. That is thoughtful of me, now, isn't it?"

"What did Lucy say?" said Kate, with some abruptness.

"She said I had no right to ask her after neglecting you all so long."

"And she was quite right, George."

"Yes, that is the worst of it; I couldn't palliate the offence."

Kate got out of patience again. There was no arguing with George; he always agreed with you.

"But surely you said something! You don't suppose that any girl with a spark of feeling would throw herself away on a spiritless man who only says 'No' and 'Yes,' and never makes an effort to defend himself?"

"I did all I could, Kate; but you see I really have acted like a brute."

"Well, but that's all past. What is the good of talking like that? I can quite understand Lucy's refusal. If a lover had behaved so to me when I was a girl I should have boxed his ears."

"No, you wouldn't," said George, smiling.

"Well, he would have deserved it, at any rate. Now, what else did you say? It strikes me Lucy did all the talking."

It struck George too. What had he said beyond confessing his sins? he scarcely remembered.

“Well?”

“Well, Kate, I said that my income was not a large one; but—but——”

“But that you hoped to get on in your profession, and that one day you might be a Queen’s Counsel or a Remembrancer, or whatever they call big lawyers.”

“No, I didn’t say that—it never occurred to me; but even if it had, I don’t think I should have ventured—Lucy would never have believed me.”

“No, she would not,” remarked Kate, a little sharply.

“I’m afraid I was very stupid. I said that with her income added to mine we might live happily enough.”

“You said that?” cried Kate, coming to a full stop.

“Yes.”

“And do you suppose any woman would feel honoured by being told that she was to supply the means of her subsistence? Is that the way to propose to a lady?”

“Oh, please don’t be hard on a fellow. It was the honest truth, and I thought it best to say so. It is because I love Lucy so much that I put everything plainly before her.”

Kate was only half mollified.

“And what do you propose to do now?”

“I am going to make Ned give me some work. He can, as he employs two or three clerks, and I can copy and engross pretty well. It might lead to something in the end, for what I am doing now never will.”

“But you are writing for M. de Belle-

ville's magazine; you must not forget that."

"No; I'll rewrite my story. I promised Lucy to do so."

"Has she definitely refused you, George?"

"Definitely." George put his pipe in his mouth to see if it were still alight, and finding it was not, beat out the ashes.

"Did she say why?" asked Kate, after a pause.

George nodded his head despondingly.

"But you will ask her again?"

"She has made me promise not to do so."

Kate could get no more from her cousin. While she stood plucking a head of lavender to pieces, George, notwithstanding his boast about thoughtfulness, lit himself another pipe, and, leaning against the low stone wall, smoked on in silence.

Each of them occupied with their own thoughts, there was still a common subject in their minds, so that when one or other spoke neither had a difficulty in affording a ready answer. Neither may have regarded Lucy's decision as absolutely final, but there was enough in Lucy's behaviour to set them thinking whether there might not be some other object influencing her.

How long they would have remained there among the lavender, if it had not been for M. de Belleville, who was seen coming across the field supported on crutches, is uncertain. At another time Kate would have run forward to welcome their neighbour, but she was not in the humour to meet company just then. M. de Belleville passed into the Lanthradynne grounds unheeded.

But great was Kate's surprise when

they walked back to the house to find their French visitor had not put in an appearance. So George went off to look for him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BROWN GLOVE.

It was to the garden-house that George directed his steps. He carried his pipe in his hand, for he had lost the case ; and as the coach-house door was open, he went in, with a view to search for the missing object. The boys had been playing with it, he thought, or perhaps it had fallen from his pocket when he took off his coat.

He might have remained a long time groping about the corners of the shed had not a form rapidly passed the door, going towards the house, a figure which could

be no other than Lucy's. This called him to himself once more, and he gave up the search and proceeded towards the summer-house.

At first he thought no one was there, all was so quiet; but as he came closer there was M. de Belleville in a corner, with the little table covered with papers in front of him.

The Frenchman was a pleasant, good-looking fellow, between thirty-five and forty, and it was only when standing that his short stature gave him something of an insignificant look. Seated, he was really a handsome man, while his manners and breeding were quite of the *vieille noblesse* school.

"Mr. Vanbrugh, welcome," he said, looking up. "I am so accustomed to be here, you see, that I look upon the place as my own."

"I hope I am not disturbing you?"

"No; I have finished. I was about to go into the house, for I knew Mr. Mallelieu would be at home at one. Papers about the magazine, you see."

"They give you a lot of trouble, I suppose?"

"Yes; but our good friend Ferdinand takes much of the routine work off my hands. This is a cheque for the printers, which I want Mallelieu to pay for me."

George took the cheque which M. de Belleville held out for his inspection. It was for three hundred pounds, and George could not help expressing surprise at the largeness of the amount.

"It is a great deal of money, Mr. Vanbrugh, but we shall want more than that when we fairly start. That is for advertisements and preliminary announcements. Perhaps you would be good

enough to let Mr. Mallelieu have it, and I need not then go into the house."

"I think, as it is a large sum, it would be better to put it into his own hands, sir; I never like having to do with money which is not my own."

M. de Belleville laughed. "I am afraid I am not trusting either you or Mr. Mallelieu in the matter, for the cheque is crossed, and it is only payable to order."

George smiled too, but he handed back the cheque.

"And when are we to have your novel, Mr. Vanbrugh? I hope you will not keep us long. We must get the first number out by Christmas, so that you have very little time."

There was something George desired to talk about more than his novel; but M. de Belleville's question was invitation sufficient for him to approach nearer, and

to take a seat by his literary patron. He should be returning to town in a day or two, he said, and his first duty would be to look up his work and send it for inspection.

"You will fall out of Miss Medicott's good graces, I fear, if you do not keep your word, Mr. Vanbrugh," said the Frenchman, for George had not spoken about the matter in an enthusiastic tone.

"Just so," said George, hardly knowing what to say now his cousin's name had been brought into the conversation.

M. de Belleville guessed the other's thoughts, for he continued—

"How is Miss Medicott this morning? is her foot quite well now?"

"Yes, I believe so," said George, absently.

"I am so glad to hear it. That was

the one reason why I desired to bring round this cheque myself."

"I thought," observed George, rather clumsily, "that you had seen Miss Medlicott yourself this morning, for I met her just now coming from the garden."

M. de Belleville raised his eyes as he said, good-humouredly, "So that is why Mr. Vanbrugh is a little nettled; I see now. If I had known Miss Medlicott was so near me, I should have been much pleased at the opportunity of a quiet *tête-à-tête*. But I had no such good fortune, I assure you. No; Mr. Vanbrugh may trust me entirely." And the little French gentleman bowed politely and became serious.

"I ask your pardon if I have said anything to vex you, sir," said George. "It is true I thought it possible that Miss Medlicott and you had met this morning,

but it was mere surmise on my part; even had you done so, I have no right whatever to require an explanation."

The Frenchman scarcely understood.

"I mean that being merely a guest here, like yourself, I have no reason for acting as Miss Medlicott's champion," blundered George.

"Ah, my dear Mr. Vanbrugh, do not say anything more, I pray. The ladies of Lanthradynne are so charming that we would all wish to be their champions, I am sure. I suppose you are old acquaintances?"

"Yes," answered George, briefly; for he had a particular dislike to continue the conversation. So he changed the subject by referring to the village, and to the woods and hills around Dalebrook. M. de Belleville was nothing loth, and presently they were chatting away together as

pleasantly as if nothing had come between them, let alone the name of Miss Medlicott.

So loud and merry was the conversation that the approach of one of the maids with a message quite startled them, she appeared before them so suddenly.

"Well, what is it, Jane?" cried George, rising, as the servant stood stock still and said nothing.

Jane only looked from one to the other, and became more frightened still. The Frenchman had risen too, as well as he was able, grasping the table with his hands. The smile from his lips had disappeared, and he looked fixedly at the messenger.

George unconsciously grew alarmed. He seized the girl's wrist. "Speak, woman, can't you? What is it?"

It was the pain inflicted on her which

loosened her tongue, for she cried out immediately, "Miss Lucy's glove, a brown one. She left one of them here on the table just now."

The servant pointed to where the glove was, half covered by M. de Belleville's papers. He snatched it up and flung it at the girl.

The men remained facing each other for some moments after the maid had gone. The Frenchman shook with passion, the other was motionless and ghastly pale.

"Mr. Vanbrugh, you have a right to an explanation."

George slightly inclined his head. He still stood, but his rival had resumed his seat on speaking.

"I have but a very few words to say. I told you just now I had not seen Miss Medicott. That was not true."

Again George nodded.

"I was guilty of a lie ; but there are some circumstances under which a lie is justifiable with a man of honour. I had not Miss Medlicott's permission to mention our interview, and I had no alternative, Mr. Vanbrugh, but to deny it."

M. de Belleville paused once more, but George did not reply.

"You must not judge me too harshly, Mr. Vanbrugh. Ask yourself how you would have acted under the circumstances."

"I don't know. I hope I may never have an interview with a lady which I dare not acknowledge," said George, slowly.

"I hope not, Mr. Vanbrugh, sincerely. In the mean time I trust you will not the less feel the delicacy of my position." M. de Belleville sank back in his chair and

passed a delicate cambric handkerchief over his face.

George had not moved from his position, but now that he had heard all he prepared to bring the interview to an end.

“I am not called upon for an opinion of your conduct, M. de Belleville, and I shall not express one. I think, however, that Mr. Mallelieu should be acquainted with your attentions, and if you do not mention the subject, I shall certainly do so.”

With this George abruptly took his departure. It might have been boorish to have acted thus, but he was in no mind to be civil to anybody just then—himself rejected two hours ago, and his fortunate rival desiring to make a confidant of him. The talk about literature and his novel was obviously for the pur-

pose of flattering him and making things pleasant while his bride slipped away from under his hands.

He had told the Frenchman that his doings would be made known to Ferdinand Mallelieu. Was this a threat? Was it not exceedingly likely that Ferdinand was already perfectly acquainted with the state of affairs? Why else should this M. de Belleville feel such an interest in the family and be ready to benefit Ferdinand by making him editor of the new periodical? Again, what did Lucy's designing and painting portend if it did not mean a deep interest in the Frenchman's welfare?

George comprehended all now, and hit himself several thuds in the chest for not thinking of it before, as he hurried on in a walk across the fields. He grew quite sarcastic at last, for being so taken in—a

high and mighty gentleman coming down from town to favour his country friends with a visit, and to choose a wife from among them, and they refusing to have anything to do with him. It was such a new and refreshing experience that it would be positively delightful, George thought, if he had not made quite such a fool of himself. He was welcome enough, and they were all glad to see him, no doubt, but nobody wanted him particularly, unless it was the philosopher and Wat. The last enjoyed George's company exceedingly, but then, as he was bound to admit, he had not been thinking of gratifying them in his visit to Lanthradynne.

What a pity he did not listen to that small voice within him which prompted the leaving behind of his luggage in the first place. If he had only carried out that former intention of his, and excused

himself by saying he was simply walking through Kent. What was he to say to Shorter and his friends in town, or to Job Hollings, if they met again? George shut his lips firmly and walked faster still.

Only one bright spot was there in the dreary waste he looked back upon. Kate had been kind to him and wished him well—Kate, whose love he had indifferently allowed to pass to another. And as he thought of her goodness, he resolved to tell all he knew of M. de Belleville's interview, so that Lucy, at any rate, should not be without an adviser.

He would not be a coward and run away. It wanted five or six days more to complete the fortnight's visit he projected, and he would not go a day before his time. He owed this to Kate, moreover, who would be woefully vexed if the

time were shortened. So, having made up his mind, he wheeled round and made for the house.

There was no one about the place, and he was glad of it, for he should never be himself again until he got his old friend the piano to sympathize with him. Door and windows were open in the drawing-room, and he could smell the honeysuckle and roses in the hedge below as he sat fingering the keys.

The notes had been his confidant many times already, and although they now responded but dolefully, George was thankful enough for their expressions of sympathy. The music he made was "without words," but George understood it. Its plaintive whispering, its liquid voice, its tearful utterances were better consolation to him than aught else.

So absorbed was he in this selfish pursuit that he never heard of his playmates' approach. They must have been standing quietly by, hand-in-hand, for some minutes before George noticed their serious little faces. He quite frightened them, for when George paused for a moment they still held aloof.

"Well, Wat!" cried George.

"Ferdie said you was dead," was the low reply of the little fellow.

"Did he? What nonsense!" And George gave a sudden twirl on the music-stool, which at once fetched sunshine into his companions' faces.

"Well, then, will you draw me a piggy?" said Wat, becoming animated.

"And will you mend my whip?" asked the philosopher, bringing that instrument from behind his back. "The string has comed off."

George at once brought his mind to bear upon the duties to be performed. Upon an old envelope he proceeded to sketch the pig required, being enjoined the while to do it "carefly," the owner of the picture taking the precaution to borrow his silver pencil-case into the bargain when the animal was handed over.

The philosopher's wants were next attended to, that gentleman being very particular about the number of knots desired in the lash, all of which were to add to George's woes when next he impersonated the pony. George took the opportunity of questioning the boys about his lost pipe-case, but they were too absorbed in matters at hand to be interested in the subject. The philosopher's attention was all concentrated on his whipcord, while Wat, with paper and pencil

in hand, went about pretending to be the baker's boy, sucking the pencil, and calling out, "Does you want some bread?"

George's troubles were not over when he had finished the construction of his own instrument of torture, for in the mean time two "woolly-bear caterpillars" had been espied upon the window-sill. These were immediately captured and formed into a racing stud. George was starter, and a course having been cleared on the drawing-room table, the sport forthwith began. Unfortunately the stud was not so eager for racing as its masters, and considerable delay arose on account of deviations from the course. Moreover, Wat would assist his animal more than was quite fair, to get it "a little more farther," as he said, both George and the philosopher crying out against such

flagrant abuse of turf regulations. Jockeying the animals with a bit of straw that they might run straight was allowable enough, but Wat wanted every now and then to push his representative bodily onwards in its career.

The consequence was that in the end George had to protest warmly against such conduct, and Master Wat grew obstreperous. In vain did the clerk of the course urge moderation and the necessity for fair play. Wat would not listen to reason. He abruptly broke off all relations, and would have nothing more to do with it.

“Give me mine caterpillar,” he said, firmly, and went off downstairs with his property.

“There is only the philosopher left me of all the family,” thought George. “You

won't run away and leave me, will you ? ”
he said.

“ No, of course not,” replied the
owner of the whip ; “ ’cos I want you to
be my pony again.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. EDWARD SHORTER AT HOME.

THE only way to catch Ned Shorter at home was to be at his chambers early and wait till he got up. He worked late into the night, and only rose in time for a hurried breakfast. But George could talk to him while dressing and ride to the court with him in the cab afterwards.

George Vanbrugh had loyally carried out his resolve to remain at Lanthradynne a full fortnight, and even went so far as to promise Kate to run down again before the summer had entirely gone. Much as he disliked the business, too, he men-

tioned the circumstance of M. de Belleville's intimacy with Lucy. It was touching this matter that George promised to return. Kate was positive there was no engagement between Lucy and the Frenchman, nor was there likely to be any. He must not run away, therefore, with that notion; and Kate fully believed that if he, George, did not marry Lucy, no one else would. Clearly Kate regarded George's story to be due to jealousy more than anything else, and she begged him so feelingly to come back and assure himself of the truth of her statement, that he had no alternative but to comply.

He found his novel at Spring Gardens, where he conceived it to be. There were marks of coal dust on the cover, and the last pages were so hopelessly dogseared and crumpled that it was impossible to

send up the book for inspection in that state. So George set to work to remove front and back, and to substitute freshly written pages instead. He told Lucy it should be done, and much as he disliked the work he went through with it.

Not until he had performed this task—never opening the piano even during the few days it occupied, lest he should relapse into lazy habits—did George sally forth to look after his comrades. Even his visit to Shorter was put off until the bulky manuscript was packed up and sent off to Lanthradyn.

But now the weight was off his mind, he delayed no longer. At nine in the morning George Vanbrugh was in the Temple and knocking at the door, which still bore his name over that of Shorter's—

MR. GEORGE VANBRUGH.

MR. EDWARD SHORTER.

Mr. Shorter's chief clerk and factotum admitted George. He was a lad of eighteen or nineteen, who had originally been their joint clerical assistant at a salary of five shillings a week; but that was ages ago, and Mr. Whiffler had almost forgotten the fact. With George he was still affable enough, although as familiar as he dared to be.

"Oh, it's you, sir! Glad to see you looking so well. Come in, sir; guv'ner still in bed," he said in a lower tone, jerking his thumb in the direction of the adjoining room; "but he'll be up directly."

"Have you got a newspaper?" said George, sitting down in an easy chair, and not paying much attention to the voluble clerk.

"No, I haven't, Mr. Vanbrugh; it hasn't come—at least, I don't think so. But as it's for you, I'll go and look."

“Do.”

“Oh yes, here they are, the *Standard* and the *Daily News*. Which will you have, Mr. Vanbrugh?”

“Both.”

Mr. Whiffler did not like to be treated in this cavalier fashion, so, by way of protest, he remained in the sitting-room, brushing his master's boots in George's presence. His conduct had, however, little effect upon the visitor, who contentedly read the paper without a glance in Mr. Whiffler's direction.

It was half-past nine before a small being in white threw open the bedroom door and gave a loud yawn as he sleepily looked at the clock over the mantel-piece and tugged at his unkempt hair.

“Have another lie down, Ned,” said George, as his friend turned away again.

“I thought somebody was there. Why,

George, how are you, old man?" And the figure in white walked straight up to Vanbrugh and shook hands. "Whiffler, clear."

"Yes, sir."

"I got your letter, George, and am awfully sorry about that marriage affair not coming off. It was the best thing for you, I'm sure, and there's nothing else to do that I can see."

"That's what I said; but it was no good."

"You didn't go telling Miss Lucy a lot of confounded romantic stories, I hope."

George was about to give his word he had done no such thing, when he saw Shorter was laughing at him; so Shorter's boots were summarily sent after their owner by way of reply. One of them hit the outer door, and, in consequence, Mr.

Whiffler opened it to see if he were wanted.

"My hot water. Look sharp!" cried Ned. He left his bedroom door open that they might have a talk while he dressed.

"Well, about this affair of yours," said Shorter, gasping from his cold bath.

"What do you propose to do?"

"To let it slide."

"The deuce!" said Shorter, coming to the door again, as he vigorously worked his towel. "You don't mean to say it's as bad as that?"

George shook his head as he folded up the newspaper.

"You know, George, you are a good deal to blame in the business, after all. You let the thing be as if it were all settled."

"Go it, Ned. I am quite used to it

now; I can take any amount of blowing up."

Shorter laughed. "Why not get the girls in town for a month, and work on their feelings? I know country cousins will do anything for you if you only take them to a few theatres and concerts. Poor, dear George, did it feel out of sorts, then?" The little barrister lathered his chin preparatory to freeing his face from everything beyond the closely trimmed black whiskers that ornamented his visage.

George was not disposed to let the rally pass unchallenged, but walked into the doorway between the rooms to give his reply more effect. "You old fool, Ned, do you suppose I can lose my time dangling after girls all my life? No, thank you; I have more important things to do. If you want to know, I have just concluded a literary engagement. I am

to write the serial novel for a new magazine; finishing it and packing it off made me so late turning up here."

Shorter was shaving during this speech; but if George imagined his late partner would cut himself, or inflict other bodily harm, he was disappointed. The form, still in white, waited until he had laboriously finished one side of his face, and then simply turned round for a moment before he began with the other.

"Ah, you may believe it or not, my fine fellow; it's a fact."

Mr. Edward Shorter's solemn face broke into a laugh as he stropped his razor and put it away. "Bravo, George! very good; very good indeed. But you will have to get a better story than that if I am to believe it."

"Well, you'll see."

"I shall. And what's the name of the

span-new magazine that's going to make your fortune?"

"Oh, I can tell you, never fear. The —the *Green*—something or other."

"So I should think," cried Ned, slapping the other on the back as high up as he could reach, whereupon George's gravity forsook him too, and the two laughed heartily together.

They sat down to breakfast. There was hot tea, kept warm under a cosey, and Mr. Whiffler brought in some chops and bacon which had been fried in the ante-room. There was no ceremony, for the two had frequently taken the same meal together. It was something of a galloping repast so far as Mr. Shorter was concerned; for he knew very well that unless he got a substantial breakfast there was little else for him to depend upon during the day.

“It’s about this literary business that I wanted to see you, Ned.”

“You mean that beastly old novel of yours? Chuck it in the fire and have done with it.”

George Vanbrugh smiled. “I should be quite willing, and in fact I thought it was lost and gone long ago. No, it’s nothing to do with that. But I want to know what your idea is as to the success of a new magazine?” And George briefly recounted the heads of the scheme.

“Are they all as well versed in business matters as you are, for instance?” asked Ned, drinking his tea, having been busy with his breakfast during the whole of the narration.

“I hardly think they know as much,” replied George. “Mallelieu makes a point rather of having no connection with

business people, and the Frenchman pretends also to be something of a superior being. I protested over and over again that I did not understand anything about printing and publishing, but, do you know, I think I was the most experienced of the three."

"You are quite sure you are not joking, George."

"Honour bright; we have got estimates and designs for the cover and all sorts of things, and three hundred pounds have been paid for advertisements and preliminary expenses."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I saw the cheque."

"Well, this is the most refreshing bit of greenery I ever heard of. It is only in an Arcadian paradise, as Lanthradyme must be, that such delightful ideas on matters of business could possibly ger-

minate. The plan is simplicity itself, or," and Shorter rose to give his words more emphasis, "there is a piece of confounded rascality mixed up with it that should not be very difficult to discover."

"You mean that you mistrust the lame Frenchman, and that his journal is to be started to some end. That was exactly my idea; but what purpose could it serve?"

Shorter took his wig off the stand and tried to set some of its ragged curls in order, but this did not seem to aid his reflection.

"My idea was," cried George, "that he wanted it, perhaps, for Stock Exchange purposes; but then it is absurd to suppose that a monthly magazine could influence prices. He has been engaged in literature before."

"How do you know?"

"Because he told me so."

The criminal lawyer could not repress a sneer at his witness breaking down so completely; while the witness, for his part, laughed aloud at the result of the professional cross-examination. Mr. Shorter tried again.

"You say you saw this cheque for three hundred pounds?"

"I did."

"To whom was it payable?"

"Stop a moment; Messrs. Bracebridge and Philipps."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, perfectly. Besides, I know Mallelieu paid it. He came to town with me last week on purpose. It is a firm in the Minories, but I do not remember the number."

"Hang the number. Here, Whiffler,

look up in the Post Office Directory for Bracebridge and Philipps, and let me know who they are—printers or advertising agents most likely.”

That slim youth, who had now donned a black coat of shiny exterior, ready to accompany his chief into court, at once turned to the red volume, his sharply-pointed nose travelling slowly up and down in the direction of the columns as he glanced at them one after another.

“Well?” cried Shorter, testily.

“Can’t find nothing, sir.”

“Then turn to the traders—under ‘Advertising Agents.’”

The search was equally in vain.

“Well, look here, Whiffler, give me the bag; Mr. Vanbrugh will go with me to the court. Don’t turn up later than one, and that will give you a couple of hours to find out if these people are

known in the Minorities. You know the name: Bracebridge and Philipps."

Mr. Whiffler laboriously wrote it down in a clear hand upon a piece of blue office paper, and then folded up the document as if it were of the greatest importance.

"I will send a cab on, sir, as I pass the stand," he said, in the politest manner.

"If you will be so good, Mr. Whiffler." Then, as soon as that gentleman had departed, he turned sharply to George, and said, "Write at once to Lanthradyn, and ask Mrs. Mallelieu not to embark a farthing in the speculation; she must make Lucy promise the same. That Frenchman is trying to get their money—that's the secret of the whole plan."

"Very likely," said George; "indeed, I should have suggested the same thing had I dared. But you see my position, Ned. I am a rejected suitor while he is

in favour. Anything I say will only be attributed to envy, at any rate by Mallelieu. We have already had an unpleasant tiff over the business. I scarcely see how I can do more."

"What nonsense, George! Surely you must know as well as I do that the whole affair of the magazine is a sham."

"Not altogether; after what I have seen I think there is something in it."

"Well, if we find there is no such firm as Bracebridge and Philipps in existence, will you believe then?"

"Oh yes, willingly."

"Well, I ask no more; and in that case, mind, you must write as I say to Mrs. Mallelieu."

George Vanbrugh did not like the prospect, but he was bound to admit the urgent necessity of such a step. It was like giving the last blow to his hopes,

instead, as he had intended, of trying to win back, step by step, the position he once occupied in Lucy Medlicott's heart. Lately, too, he had plucked up his spirits wonderfully under the idea that she might yet come to be his wife one of these days.

Shorter, in the mean time, while waiting for the cab, had placed his red bag on the table, and was laughing over a bit of paper attached to one of the briefs.

"See here, Vanbrugh, what our scholarly clerk has done. 'Please to read this brief.—A. W.' I don't know which is the more offensive, his gentlemanly behaviour or his profuse penmanship. And dash it all, this is the very brief I said I wouldn't read unless it was marked."

"Perhaps he has read it, and made marginal notes," cried George, who pro-

ceeded to open it, while Shorter glanced over his other papers. "Hullo, Ned, why, here's a cheque for five guineas! you can't have opened the brief." And George held the slip of paper close to his friend's eyes.

"Eh, by Jove! you don't say so. That's what Whiffler meant, I suppose. Well, it proves anyhow that barristers should always look over their briefs, don't it? You see, in defending a prisoner in a case of this kind, I find you can generally gather facts enough when they are stating the case for the prosecution. That's why I always say the prosecuting counsel is entitled to double fees, because he must get up the case before coming into court."

"I think, then, I'll get some other member of the bar than Mr. Edward Shorter to defend me when I'm in trouble," laughed George.

“ So that I may be available for the prosecution. There's the cab; come along.”

But at that moment there came a rap at the outer door, and Shorter opening it, the visitor asked for Mr. George Vanbrugh.

“ He is very busy at this moment ; he is just off to the Central Criminal Court, and the cab is below.”

“ Then he has some work to do to-day, sir ? ”

“ Work ! his hands are always full ; never a moment's leisure until eleven at night. He hasn't been out of town these nineteen years ! ” rattled Shorter, with the door in his hands. “ Will you leave your name ? ”

“ Yes ; and I will call again, sir, at eleven to-night, for I want to see him particularly.”

"Why, it's Mr. Job Hollings," cried George, coming forward. "How do you do, Mr. Hollings?"

Job became quite himself over the hearty grasp of the hand. In fact, he went so far as to smile, as he shook his head at George, and murmured half aloud, "At it again, sir?"

"About my working, you mean, eh? Well, you see, Job, the fact is, my friend here, Mr. Shorter——"

"Took you for the income tax-collector," put in Ned. "You know one always wants to appear as rich as one can in his presence, so I rather exaggerated matters. But you had better come with us into the cab," continued Shorter, pushing his two callers into the passage and locking the door. "You won't mind a ride, I suppose?"

"I should prefer walking," said Job.

“What, to carousing in a four-wheeler, with plenty of straw like this, and damp plush to sit upon? Nonsense; get in with you all.”

“Don’t mind him, Job. You are the very man we wanted to see. When were you at Lanthradyn?”

“Last night.”

“And how was the lame Frenchman?” asked Shorter, sarcastically.

Job gave a curious look of intelligence.

“He can walk now without his crutches; I thought I would come and tell you, sir.”

CHAPTER X.

MR. SHORTER SUCCOURS LOVELY WOMAN IN DISTRESS.

THERE was scarcely time to explain to Shorter who Job Hollings was before the cab reached the Old Bailey. Job had kept George Vanbrugh's card, and hence his appearance in the Temple. M. de Belleville had never been a friend of Job's ; and hearing from the servants that the Frenchman was in higher favour than ever, while George Vanbrugh had been sent about his business, a greater dislike still, had been the consequence.

The Frenchman's appearance without his crutches, in a lane some miles from Dalebrook, where Job met him early one morning, caused the latter at once to report the matter.

"Did he say anything?" asked George.

"Yes, sir, he was bound to say something; and so he told me it was the infusion I brought him which had done his leg so much good. He wanted to give me another sovereign, but I wouldn't have it."

"How came you to be walking in that direction, Mr. Hollings?" cross-examined Shorter.

"Well, sir, it was partly in my way."

"But not altogether. Had you not an idea you might see him?"

"Well, yes, sir, I had; in fact, I started rather early on purpose."

"I see, I see; then it was not entirely

an accident. Did you tell the good people at Lanthradyne?"

"No, sir, for I had not time. You see it only happened yesterday morning as I was leaving the place, and I thought my best plan was to come on and see Mr. Vanbrugh first of all."

As usual, the evil-smelling court was crowded, but Mr. Shorter's face was at once a passport to the party, who passed policeman after policeman, through a mob of pushing, swearing men and women of a particularly morose type. Unable to obtain admittance, they amused themselves by recognizing the more favoured advocates by name, apostrophizing one as "Monty," another as "Young Mr. George," while the last arrival was loudly announced as "Shorty Ted."

"And this is fame, my dear George," said Shorter.

“Worthy of such a sweet-smelling temple, Ned, at any rate.”

The criminal barrister gave a rapid “Good morning” to his friends around, and dived into his bag for the first brief. Then he glanced for a moment at the dock, where a middle-aged female of fresh complexion, with short black curls, was waiting to catch his eye and give a nod of recognition.

“Oh, it’s that old woman again, under another *alias*, is it!” muttered Mr. Shorter between his teeth, as he turned the brief over. “I didn’t know her at first in that black front. I’ve got that wretch off at least half a dozen times, George, at one police court or another; but latterly, it seems, she got somebody else to defend her, and has been committed for trial. Serve the old gal right. Ah, I see she describes herself as a pew-

opener from a Liverpool chapel, on her first visit to London. She was in the crowd watching a fashionable marriage at St. George's, Hanover Square—the simple-minded creature is naturally interested in churches and chapels—and because she elbowed her way about they concluded she must be a pickpocket. Was there ever such an iniquitous charge? No doubt the poor soul got hustled herself, and some accomplished thief threw down the purse which was found empty under her feet. It is absurd to accuse a woman simply because she is found with four sovereigns and a half in her pocket, and that happened to be the amount in the purse."

And this was the point to which Mr. Shorter at once addressed himself when it came to the defence. He did not wish to touch upon it at the end of his re-

marks, or slur over the fact, he told the jury. He mentioned it definitely and clearly at the outset, because it was this simple coincidence alone upon which the whole prosecution was based. If his client, Martha Briggs, had been known at that court as a convict or consort of thieves, he would not have troubled himself to defend her; but seemingly there was nothing to prove that she was not what she described herself. If every individual in a London crowd were liable to be dragged to prison because an empty purse was found beside him, and convicted because the amount he happened to have in his pocket approached the sum said to have been in the purse, nobody would be able to walk the streets with safety. The prosecutor could not swear to the actual coins, and thus the case came to an end. He, Mr. Shorter,

would not say a word on any other point—he absolutely declined to do so. It would be absurd on his part, in fact, to look at the matter seriously. He left it to the common sense of the jury and their wide experience of London life to say whether such a thing might not have happened to any one of them, or, at any rate, to a person less knowing in respect to town practices than they were. It was hardly worth while to mention the fact, since he was assured the jury would not require the explanation; but in case there were sceptics present, he would say that his client had but an hour before changed a five-pound note to pay for the very shawl she now wore over her shoulders, and the four pounds ten shillings were simply the change. There, then, was the end of the whole mystery, if mystery they chose to term it. He

should say nothing more. Whatever persuasive ability or gift of speech he might possess would be utterly out of place if employed in a case of this kind, which even the most prejudiced could apostrophize as but one of doubt; and the jury had no other alternative than to give the prisoner the benefit of that doubt.

Mr. Shorter's speech did not occupy more than a quarter of an hour, but before he concluded, his disgust at the whole business so far overcame his feelings as to cause him to throw the brief down on the desk in front of him. Nor did he recover his usual spirits for some time. He sat down regardless of his glossy black gown, and thrusting his hands in his pockets leaned back as far as he could. It was only after the judge had summed up—who, by the way, behaved rather unkindly to Mr. Shorter,

considering the earnest way that gentleman had troubled himself to convince the Court of the prisoner's innocence—and the jury had retired, that he consented once more to have speech with George and Mr. Hollings, who were immediately behind.

“A very fine speech, sir; I congratulate you, sir,” said George, half aloud.

“I'll give you such a one-r, George, as soon as we get outside,” was the little barrister's reply.

Job had been too scared at the whole of the proceedings to utter a word, but now he took courage to ask Mr. Shorter if he thought the prisoner would get off.

“Yes, Mr. Hollings, if the jury remain out another ten minutes. It is the conscientious juryman who keeps them waiting, and he is always a simple-minded

creature, who believes in the innocence of everybody. I'll give them a quarter of an hour, and then we will be off to lunch."

Mr. Shorter proved right, for the jury after a short delay returned into court and acquitted the prisoner. The judge in a surly manner ordered her to be discharged; but long before this the skirts of Shorter's gown were flying along the passage and downstairs, whither George and Job followed as soon as they were able.

Mr. Whiffler had returned from his errand, and while the party seated themselves in a corner of an adjacent coffee-room, waiting for their chops and potatoes, the clerk began a long and verbose account of his visit.

"Cut all that," was his chief's impatient reply; he preferred his favourite

method of examination as a speedier means of getting at what he wanted.

“What’s the exact address?”

Mr. Whiffler gave it.

“Who was at the office?”

“Two men.”

“Much doing?”

“There were plenty of newspapers and circulars lying on the counter about racing and betting.”

“Bring any of them?”

“No; they wouldn’t let me.”

“Did it look like a steady, well-to-do business?”

Mr. Whiffler shook his head.

“Long firm, eh?”

“Yes.”

“That will do.”

Mr. Shorter waited until the lunch appeared, and then said sharply, as he took up knife and fork—

"Look here, Mr. Hollings, you are as interested in this matter as ourselves, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Job, putting on his spectacles in his agitation to be as attentive as possible.

"Well, if you'll begin your lunch, I'll tell you what must be done."

George from mere habit had begun to eat, but poor Job made but a very feeble attempt; he could not eat and keep his spectaclled eyes on Mr. Shorter at the same time.

"I told Mr. Vanbrugh this morning that Frenchman was a scoundrel, and your testimony and that of my clerk confirms the opinion. While I was defending that old woman just now I thought the matter well over, and I, as a mutual friend, have determined to act upon my own responsibility in the affair. There

may be no harm done as yet, but we know at least that there are hawks and pigeons in close proximity, and therefore mischief may happen at any moment. I shall at once draw the attention of the police to M. de Belleville's whereabouts at Dalebrook and that of his correspondents in the Minorities."

"No; I can't let you do that, Ned, until you have consulted the Mallelieus." The thought of Shorter's energetic action had rendered George as incapable of lunch as Job.

"I shall write this evening to Mr. and Mrs. Mallelieu, asking them to call upon me on a matter of particular importance, so that the responsibility of communicating the affair rests entirely with me."

"And while they are here in town this Frenchman will have Lucy to himself."

"One moment. I was coming to that.

Our friend Mr. Hollings steps in here. I am sure if he can serve us he will. Could you pass the next three or four days at Lanthradyne, to act as a sort of bodyguard to Miss Lucy, think you? I do not suppose there is really anything to fear, but still I agree with Mr. Vanbrugh that some trustworthy person should be present."

Job squeezed one hand in the other by turns before replying.

"If it is only a question of money, Job, don't let that distress you," cried George.

"Well, sir, it is more money than anything else, although Mrs. Parkle is mortal jealous too. You see, sir, I'm not my own master altogether."

"Married?" said Shorter, raising his eyes.

Job's countenance approached a smile

as nearly as possible. "No, it's not that, sir; I meant Mrs. Parkle, who manages the business."

"Oh, George here will settle her. He shall go with you at once and see the old lady. Get Mr. Hollings a week if you can, George, and mind, sir, to keep a sharp eye on that Frenchman. I will write to Dalebrook post-office if there is anything to tell you. I must be off now; look in some time this evening, George."

Mr. Shorter was away to the court again, munching a crust as he went, and leaving the others to carry out his rapid instructions. George had some misgivings as to "settling" Mrs. Parkle, and had he known Job's feelings in the matter his mind would have been still less at ease. However, it was too late now, and Shorter's orders must be obeyed.

"I always thought that Frenchman was shamming lameness, Mr. Vanbrugh. It gave him an excuse for borrowing Miss Lucy's pony-chaise ; but I did not think there was much harm else. I would have shammed sickness myself to have got Miss Lucy's sympathy."

George explained as well as he could what it was Shorter feared—that the man was nothing more than an adventurer, and was leagued with others to defraud or cheat the family at Lanthradyne.

"I need not tell you how much I respect Miss Lucy, Mr. Vanbrugh. If I had to throw over Mrs. Parkle's shop for ever, I would not hesitate about rendering Miss Medlicott any service in my power," said Job, taking off his spectacles.

"I know that, Job, well enough, and I know, too, that any good you can do

you will do of your own free will. It is because you are something of a favourite with Miss Medlicott that your presence at Lanthradynne will be the more valuable at a time like this."

During their walk to Clerkenwell—for Job would not go in another cab—they settled on a mode of proceeding with Mrs. Parkle. The key of the position, according to Job, was to be two sovereigns, which he nervously asked George if he had by him. If they were new and shining all the better.

George had such talismans in his pocket, and produced them. The coins met with Job's approbation, and then the plan became a very simple one. George was to ask to have some Celandine collected for him—he had obtained the name of Parkle and Co. from Bolton and Bars, the well-known druggists—and

would deposit two sovereigns to cover the expense of gathering the herbs. Job would be called in by Mrs. Parkle and the order taken.

Having noted his instructions and the way he was to reach Hart Street, George permitted Mr. Hollings to go on before. He loitered for half an hour in Exmouth Street, dividing his time between the cheap provision shops and the fish barrows on the curb, so that by the time he turned into Hart Street his nose had become acclimatized to the neighbourhood. He was, in fact, almost disappointed when he entered the establishment of Parkle and Co., and found the training undergone by his olfactory senses had been in vain, since the fragrant odours of the darkened shop were far from unpleasant.

Mrs. Parkle was seated as usual at the

back of the shop, her spectacles so adjusted that she could look over them when so pleased. She appeared to resent the appearance of a customer as an unwarrantable intrusion.

George looked at Mrs. Parkle, but as the dame did not advance, he rapped against the counter with one of the sovereigns he carried handy.

“ Well, young man ! ”

George began to say what he wanted, but the old lady either could not hear, or did not choose to do so. She would not come to him, and he could not go to her. Moreover, the novelty of the situation had put out of George's head what he had to say. Job probably guessed how matters would turn out, for he very soon made his appearance.

The customer had no difficulty now in making his wants clear. Mrs. Parkle,

nevertheless, would have nothing to say to the "young man," and sharply bade Job order him begone. But Job carried the two sovereigns to his mistress, and these changed the aspect of affairs at once. Job on his part now became obstreperous, and gave Mrs. Parkle to understand that he was by no means sure that the Celandine could be found at that season of the year; and in the end Mr. Hollings was soundly rated before the customer for presuming to know more than the head of the firm.

George retired with an assurance from Mrs. Parkle that her man should start off that very night, a dictum that was confirmed by Job in an undertone. He hastened back to the Temple to report progress, and, if possible, to delay Ned in carrying out the rest of the plan, which, to his mind, was altogether pre-

mature. But the busy barrister had already taken the steps he threatened, or at any rate said so, and there was no help for it now.

George dined at his club, where he had not been visible for nearly a month. All sorts of sly allusions and jokes had to be endured, and Vanbrugh was forced to repeat, a dozen times over, that he was as far off being married as ever. Alpha Wright assured his friend he had been afraid to call at Spring Gardens lest "the wife" should object; and another wag, Danford, had been told by somebody that Vanbrugh and his charming bride were seen only last week on the "Continong."

However, the small wit of his cronies waned after a day or two. George enjoyed his lazy life the more on account of the recent break in it. He did not care much about seeing the Mallelieus

arrangement that received Mrs. Malleliu's sanction, and before going to work that morning took the liberty of asking Miss Lucy if he could help about the house or garden, as he had nothing particular in hand.

Lucy, had she dared, would have gladly consented, but since George had not denied the reason of Job's presence at Lanthradyne, her pride resented the interference. Job had never before been spoken to so harshly.

"If there is nothing for you to do in the field, Mr. Hollings, why do you waste your time here at all? No wonder Mrs. Parkle grumbles at your laziness. There is nothing to occupy you at Lanthradyne."

"There is still plenty for me to do in the field, miss; but I thought if you would allow me to attend to some of those rose-trees, which sadly——"

"Jordan can do all that is necessary in our garden, thank you, Mr. Hollings."

"Yes, miss, I know; but as I give him a good deal of trouble at times, it is only fair I should help him occasionally."

"Thank you, Mr. Hollings, but there is nothing in which you can help just now," said Lucy, turning away, to show that the interview was at an end.

Lucy, as we know, had acquiesced in the arrangement that matters should take their course for a week, and promised, much against her will, to have no dealings with their neighbour in the interim. This was giving up more than George imagined, and accounted a good deal for Miss Lucy being put out with poor Job Hollings.

To tell the truth, she had arranged to see the Frenchman that very morning, and there had come a bundle of proofs—

among them a few pages of George's novel in type—as a reminder. It was a pity the packet did not arrive before, so that she could have carried it with her to town and shown her cousin what a man they proposed to make of him. Now it was impossible she could carry out her engagement.

Jane was informed that if M. de Belleville came to see Miss Medlicott he was to be asked to call next day, as she was too unwell to receive him; and Lucy forthwith repaired upstairs to the nursery to Masters Ferdy and Wat for protection.

How she wished Job Hollings had not been sent about his business! Jordan had driven his master and mistress over to the station, and would await their return in the evening. Jane and the dairy-maid were the only persons within call. She

was vexed with herself for being nervous, and vexed with her cousin George for having made her so. If it had not been for his putting the matter into her head she would never have felt the least scruple in an interview with the polite and diminutive Frenchman.

Wat and Ferdy found auntie Loo but an indifferent companion, for she was too occupied with her thoughts to attend to them. However, they were used to playing by themselves, and did not give much trouble. Wat built a railway of bricks, and Ferdy became an imaginary porter, heaving everything movable upon the chairs and sofa. It was under the protection of these little men that Lucy placed herself.

M. de Belleville was late in making his appearance; and when he did so Lucy, peeping over the nursery blind, perceived

that he was dressed in a smartly braided overcoat, and carried a courier bag slung across his shoulder. She was so surprised at this costume, which seemed to betoken a journey, that she listened at the door to hear what might pass between Jane and himself.

He took the servant's news very quietly. He was sorry to hear of Miss Medlicott's indisposition, since it debarred him the pleasure of seeing her before his trip to Jersey. He was starting immediately, but possibly he might see Mr. Ferdinand Mallelieu in town and place everything in his hands. Did Jane know when her master left Charing Cross ?

The servant did not know, but went to inquire ; and, as Lucy's voice was now audible to the visitor, the latter begged Miss Medlicott not to trouble herself ; all

he desired was for Mr. Mallelieu to understand that every business arrangement in respect to the magazine was now complete, and during his absence that gentleman was to take complete control. Also, would Mr. Mallelieu return the proofs direct to the printer, when he had read them, without troubling to refer them to him (M. de Belleville).

In these circumstances Lucy thought it best to receive the instructions in person. She was so thankful that the great difficulty was about to be dissolved by their neighbour's absence that she nearly forgot her supposed indisposition. Still she preferred talking to M. de Belleville in the garden rather than sitting alone with him in a room, and so she announced her intention of joining the visitor if the latter would await her coming.

She bade the children be good in her

absence, and shut the nursery door ; then, throwing a shawl over her shoulders, went downstairs for her garden hat and the packet of proofs received that morning.

M. de Belleville was profuse in his apologies. If he could see Mr. Mallelieu there was no reason at all for troubling her. She had, however, interested herself so much in the whole scheme from the commencement, that she would readily understand all he had to say. He liked George Vanbrugh's story very much, and would be glad for Miss Medicott to convey the approval to her cousin. He hoped the author would not be offended at the story appearing in type before it was paid for.

"He will be threatening the editor, or perhaps his deputy, with an action at law, eh, Miss Lucy ?"

"George will be only too delighted to

see himself in print, I know. I should so much like to show him this."

"I have no objection, but it is in Mr. Mallelieu's hands now, and he must decide if he has the time to spare. Have you looked at the other proofs?"

Lucy had not yet done so, but she began to unroll them, and that she might do so better went to the table in the summer-house.

"I ought, perhaps, just to glance over them myself," said M. de Belleville; and he sat down and hurriedly looked at sheet after sheet.

A little while passed in this occupation, and then the Frenchman rolled up the papers and gave them to Lucy again.

"You will remember what I said about them, will you not, Miss Lucy? Now, let me see; what else is there?"

The Frenchman looked before him in a

vague manner, and then, as if he had recollected something, opened the courier bag and brought out a handful of papers.

Lucy had evidently seen something of the kind before, for she rose from the table and receded some paces.

M. de Belleville did not seem to notice her ; he bent his eyes upon the papers as if intent on sorting them.

“This one and this one. I am very sorry Mr. Mallelieu is not here to sign them instead, or I should not have asked you.”

Lucy made no movement. Erect and firm, she looked down at the Frenchman and his papers.

“I beg Miss Lucy’s pardon ; did you reply ?”

“I did not ; but you know my answer well enough. I said before I would sign no papers of which I do not know the

contents ; I should not have signed the other one if my brother-in-law had not placed his name upon it."

"But I cannot get Mr. Mallelieu's signature in this instance. You yourself say he is out of reach. What shall I do?"

"I do not know."

"But why do you object to sign? This, like the other, is simply a bill for three hundred pounds which our printers and publishers are to hold as security. I have signed it, and I should be happy indeed if they were content with my name; but it is the business custom, they say, of which I am thankful I know nothing, to have one or two other names, in case of death or misfortune. It is not I who ask, Miss Lucy; I have no interest to serve in the whole affair but you and yours." The Frenchman rose and

threw the paper down in a disinterested manner.

"I cannot sign," said Lucy, firmly.

"So be it, then. I might urge you for the sake of your brother-in-law, and for your own, but I shall not do so. To prove that I bear no ill will I shall forward the document as it stands, and our publishers must act as they please. I shall at least have done my utmost."

Lucy was in an angle of the summer-house, behind the table, and when the Frenchman got up he barred her exit. It might have been an accident, but she noticed it none the less.

"Do not say hereafter that I am to blame, Miss Lucy. The guarantee may not be wanted, and in that case all will go on as we anticipated; but if not, it is you alone who are responsible, remember,

for depriving Mr. Mallelieu of his literary property."

Lucy thought for the moment whether she should not act in the matter. Her sister and brother-in-law were the only people who had a claim upon her money. She intended to give them and their children the benefit of it, and why should she hesitate now to do so?

"I am in a hurry, Miss Lucy, but if you wish five minutes' reflection I will gladly spare them. At Jersey I shall be too far away to be of service, and it is uncertain when I return. Upon yourself, therefore, depends virtually the existence of our literary project."

Perhaps if the wily Frenchman had not stepped between herself and escape, Lucy, despite the promise given George, might have been induced to affix her signature. But Lucy had too much spirit to brook

an insult ; and, as she further considered the matter, ascribed her disposition to yield rather to fear than a desire to help her relatives. There could be no doubt about her companion's motive, he watched her so narrowly. De Belleville took up a pen.

" Well, Miss Lucy, are we to leave this unsigned, or have you reflected ? " He saw she had come to some sort of resolution.

" I have reflected."

" I am so glad ! "

" I shall not sign ! "

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and put down the pen.

" You cannot be in earnest ? "

Lucy returned his fixed look. She was scared, perhaps, at his manner, but she was not afraid. In strength she felt herself a match for the man.

There was now no longer any pretence.

"You must sign!" hissed the little fellow.

"Must!"

"Aye, must!"

Lucy turned to see if she could not push past the table, but there was no room. The only way was to advance against her white-lipped foe.

"You cannot pass until you have signed."

"Do you dare to stop me, sir?"

"One word—you do not understand me, Miss Medicott. I am a desperate man. I am armed. Do not exasperate me. I must and will have your signature."

"What if I refuse?"

"Then I will not be answerable for my actions. It is too late now for gossiping; you must do as I tell you. I want the money badly."

"Then it is not for the—the—magazine?" cried the bewildered girl. She put her hands to her head to stay the throbbing.

"The magazine is all humbug, as you ought to know by this time. I am a swindler, a thief, what you will; but I must have the paper."

The passionate man rapped the table impatiently at the thought that she did not yet understand him.

"Humbug?" gasped Lucy.

"Yes, from beginning to end—of course it is. But enough of this fooling; here is the pen. Quick."

"Never!"

"Don't provoke me to violence."

"Violence!" cried the girl. "I am only a woman, but I am a match for such a man as you. Stand out of my way,

sir." Lucy put forward her hands valiantly as she advanced.

Like a cat, her lithe adversary sprang forward and caught her left arm in a vice. Before she could act, the arm was twisted round at her back. The pain was intense.

"Villain! coward! you are breaking my arm!" cried the tortured girl. "Let go—let go, I say!"

"You have your right hand still disengaged. There is the pen."

Lucy bit her lips to prevent a cry of anguish. She would still have refused, but delay only brought more torture. The tears streamed from her eyes, and her head rocked from very pain.

There was no help for it. She bent down, her eyes almost blinded with the agony, and traced the letters, while her

torturer steadied the paper. Even then the rack was not relaxed while the fellow blotted the signature.

Lucy, bent almost double with pain, had not seen a figure approach until it was close upon them; neither had her enemy, for he was busy with his disengaged hand returning the papers rapidly to his bag. But in an instant two men were locked together in close embrace, battling with the fierceness of a death-struggle.

Poor Lucy stood for some moments with her arm behind her; it hurt so, she could not believe the cause of torture had been removed. But she saw it was Job Hollings who had come to her assistance, and who was now struggling with all the tenacity of a bull-dog. The Frenchman had youth and agility on his side. Job was the heavier and more

robust of the two. The more active man strove to shake off his adversary again and again, but Job only clung the closer.

The battle lasted but a few seconds, although to Lucy, scared and frightened to a degree, it appeared hours. The Frenchman was flung into a corner, and called for mercy.

“My leg—my leg! remember my leg!”

While Job foolishly desisted for a moment, the other quickly drew a revolver from his breast and snapped it at poor Hollings. There was a crash and a cry, and the room was filled with smoke.

Lucy had seen the Frenchman dart out, catching up his bag in his flight, and had seen Job fall. There was a wound in his shoulder whence the blood was

flowing fast. Running through the shrubbery into the house, she despatched the two servants for medical aid, and then proceeded hastily to do all she could towards staunching the wound.

CHAPTER XIII.

STORMING A STRONGHOLD.

JOB HOLLINGS fainted from loss of blood, but Lucy had a good deal of her sister's practical nature about her. She knew the servants could neither of them be back for an hour, and it might be longer ere one or other returned with a doctor, so there was but herself to rely upon. A couple of handkerchiefs and a muslin curtain, hastily torn down for the purpose, were employed for a bandage; and when this had been adjusted, Lucy be-thought herself of a stimulant for the patient. Fortunately both wine and

glasses were at hand in a cupboard of the summer-house, and there was no need to run all the way indoors for them.

Job revived under this judicious treatment, but only to close his eyes again and groan painfully. Lucy asked if he were much hurt, and if she could ease him in any way; but the only reply was, 'Let me be—let me be.'

So there was nothing but to watch and wait. She dared not leave the patient, and in her anxiety about his faintness administered from time to time small doses of wine—an attention, however, which only succeeded, again and again, in drawing forth the request to let him be.

For the time she forgot all about the terrible Frenchman. Whether he made his exit by the lavender field or ran into the house she did not know; but now,

as she sat watching Job, her head grew sick and dizzy, and the scene she had witnessed was enacted over and over again. What a change had come about within the last hour! What a terrible revelation! And as the minutes passed, here was a man dying at her feet. Would they never come?

There were others besides Lucy who were weary of waiting. Ferdy and Wat, left by themselves in the nursery, climbed to the window repeatedly to see if any one were coming, after having exhausted every pastime they knew. Wat, indeed, would have cried out long ago if it had not been for the soothings of the philosopher.

"I want my mamma, I does," whimpered Wat, for the twentieth time.

"Here's soft pussy; you cuddle her," was the consolation offered.

Pussy had rather a hard time of it. She had been apportioned a Punch-book, a whip, and some bricks for her separate amusement; but since her fur offered the only solace to Wat's chubby face it was in constant requisition.

"Poor pussy! poor pussy!" continued the philosopher, with a view of still further distracting Wat's thoughts. "When pussy catches some mice, we'll put them into traps, won't we?"

The brothers caressed pussy to desperation, and the animal at last made a run for it, and jumped on a shelf out of reach.

"I want my auntie Loo to come back, and uncle George," was Wat's plaint.

"To play at pony, eh?"

"Yes; and we'll have whips and caterpillars and pipes."

Wat grew quite bright at the notion, but his brightness was only transitory.

"I want my mamma, I does," he cried, moving towards the door.

The philosopher was at his wits' ends. He clasped his brother round the neck and hugged him close, hopping and jigging round him the while, as he uttered all sorts of endearments.

Under this treatment Wat's fretful turn changed into sleepiness, and still awkwardly hugging his brother, the philosopher moved into a corner, where they sank down together. Despite the uncomfortable position, they soon dozed off, the philosopher renewing his caresses from time to time whenever Wat became restless, until at last "I want my mamma, I does," merged into sleepy incoherence.

It was about this time that three men came up the gravel walk to the house. They were London policemen, and wore their rough overcoats, pretty good evi-

dence that they had been travelling since early morning. One of the men, a sergeant, turned the handle of the front door, and finding it fast, stationed one of his satellites thereat, while he and the other constable moved round to the back.

Here was no opposition to their entrance. The door into the garden stood wide open, and, looking in, there was the broad, empty hall before them. Some signs of disorder were apparent, for one of the servants, when despatched upon her errand, cast aside her apron and stove-gloves in the passage, while Mr. Mallelieu's garden hat had been thrown down from the stand.

These objects appeared to exercise a disturbance in Mr. Sergeant's mind. Now that he could enter the house freely he seemed no longer anxious to do so.

"Looks suspicious, Jenkins, don't it?"

Jenkins gave a knowing jerk of his head.

"Don't you think we had better have Swart round with us?"

But the constable was not quite so nervous as his chief, and had advanced a pace or two into the hall. He peeped down the passage leading to the kitchen.

"Take care, Jenkins. That old woman at Ferndale said he was always up here, and this ramshackle house is not like his bit of a cottage, remember. There are lots of places about here where he can hide."

"Then come in and shut the door."

Jenkins evidently had a contempt for his superior.

"We shan't be able to see so well if I do."

The sergeant did not close the retreat behind him, but, feeling bound to do

something, advanced cautiously into the hall, and slowly lifted the apron from the floor. As he placed it upon the hall table he saw a little silver tray, upon which lay a visitor's card. The sergeant took the card into his hand, and no sooner read it than he quickly retreated, and called under his breath to his subordinate.

"This is the fellow, Jenkins. 'Mounseer de Belleville, Dalebrook, Kent.' He must be here. Get Swart round at once; or, at any rate, stop here till I come back. Swart speaks French, you know; and it would be so awkward if we could not understand the fellow when we caught him."

Constable Jenkins would have protested again, but the sergeant was already on his way round to the front of the house in search of the other constable.

Mr. Swart carried his truncheon in his

hand, and the sergeant a small pistol, attached to the wrist by a leathern thong, when they joined Constable Jenkins. Thus armed, they moved quietly up the passage.

Jenkins had already explored the kitchen and cupboards, and now penetrated dining-room and library, without making any discovery, the sergeant and Swart acting as rear-guard.

“What a strange thing there is no servant about! I hate going into a place like this, not knowing what may turn up at any moment.”

The sergeant looked as if he spoke the truth. They had now completed a survey of the ground floor, and the leader was wiping his forehead with a red cotton handkerchief.

“We’ll go upstairs now,” said Jenkins.

“One moment. It’s quite certain we

have omitted nothing down here, I suppose ? ”

“ Quite.”

“ Well, wait an instant. Just listen if we can hear anything.”

These measures brought no result, so the sergeant was fain to give the word to advance. The broad wooden stairs creaked terribly, for metropolitan policemen are not the most lightly shod beings in the world.

Another halt on the landing, for the chief would not proceed a step further until he had lighted his lantern. There were so many dark cupboards and closets to pry into that it was useless to go on unprovided with a light. But the lantern would never have been kindled had not Jenkins gone back to do it, for the sergeant's hands shook so and the pendant pistol made such a clatter that

assistance was absolutely necessary. The sergeant hung the lamp on his stiff leathern belt, so that he might have both hands free, and then pronounced himself fit and ready for action.

The bedrooms were before them. Doors and windows stood wide open, and the sergeant was relieved to find the latter not very far removed from the ground, and that, moreover, there were lattice-work and creepers outside to facilitate the escape of any evil-minded person desirous of evading his pursuers. He became bolder after this, and actually led the way into some of the better-lighted rooms.

But the sergeant's courage cooled as rapidly as it had grown. Jenkins suddenly touched him on the arm and gave a significant look in the direction of a door which might otherwise have re-

mained unseen. The room was one that had been added to the house recently, and might easily escape the notice of persons going over the place for the first time. It was an apartment built out over the coach-house.

“There is some one there,” whispered Jenkins. “I am certain I heard a movement.”

The sergeant drew back his force for a moment to consult. Each strained his ears to the utmost, but there was no renewal of the sound. It was the sergeant's proposition to knock loudly at the door and call out for it to be opened in the Queen's name, as he held a search-warrant and an order to arrest a Frenchman named De Belleville; but both Jenkins and Swart were averse to this course of action. Their advice was to attempt the arrest, as far as possible, unawares.

In the end this counsel prevailed; and the sergeant having seen to his pistol and lantern, they once more advanced. Jenkins sprang at the door, but it proved to be locked. The noise they made was not lost on the person or persons inside, for there was a hurried rustling not to be mistaken.

“Now, all altogether! burst it open!” cried Jenkins.

The heavy constables threw their whole weight against the door, and it yielded. Without more ado the sergeant pulled off his helmet and thrust it in at the open door, apparently for the purpose of drawing the fire of those inside, did they feel disposed to shoot.

Nothing followed this manœuvre, and, after a pause, Jenkins pushed in past his chief.

The other policemen followed, almost

filling the little apartment with their big burly forms. A cat, scared out of its wits, scampered past them, and its strange contortions called up a laugh from one of the corners of the room.

It was the philosopher; not knowing whether to laugh or to cry at the strange scene before him, pussy had determined the result. Wat being but half awake, and still clasped in his brother's arms, did not care much about the matter one way or the other.

The sergeant gravely made search in every corner of the apartment, behind a dappled rocking-horse, and round by Wat's big doll's house,—as if he were looking for more cats, the philosopher afterwards told auntie Loo. But nothing came of the search, so besiegers and besieged resumed their occupation of gazing at one another.

"Are you waiting for dinner?" asked the philosopher, presently.

The sergeant shook his head sternly.

"'Cos we are."

The sergeant consulted with his men for a minute or two, and then said, "Will you come down to dinner?"

"No, we mustn't; for my mamma is not here."

"But are you not hungry?"

"Oh yes, we are hungry; but we must wait till my mamma comes home."

This ruse on the part of the police sergeant to entice the young gentlemen from their corner having failed, the besiegers consulted again. It was now the philosopher's turn to question.

"Where you comed from?"

"From London."

The philosopher was interested.

"Did you went in a luggage train?"

To this the sergeant made no reply, so Master Wat, who had been drawing a pink arm across his chubby face, hazarded the remark—

“Cows goes in luggage trains, doesn't they?”

“Where's your mother and father?” asked Jenkins, good-humouredly, bending down on all fours to get a better look at the prisoners.

The elder was infinitely amused at this, and so was Wat.

“That's like uncle George.”

“Uncle George!” echoed Wat, merrily. He pulled up his white socks in satisfaction, and then put himself on all fours too.

“No nonsense, Jenkins. I'll leave you two to search the house, and take these youngsters away.”

"Take them away?" said the astonished Jenkins.

"Well, we can't leave them here, can we?" cried the sergeant, snappishly. "They have all made a clean bolt of it evidently, and deserted the kids."

The constables looked at one another, but as there was nothing else to suggest, the sergeant had his own way.

"Besides, it will be well to show we have done something. I hate coming back from a job of this kind empty-handed."

Jenkins took off his helmet and scratched his head. He looked at the prisoners and he looked at the sergeant. "It's hardly what we've come after."

"What do you mean, Jenkins? These people at Lanthradyne are most likely accomplices of the Frenchman, and if

anything turned up in our search we should have been justified in arresting them. You and Swart will continue your work and join me at the station."

The children were given to understand that if they went with the sergeant they would see mamma; and the philosopher having found a straw hat for himself, and an old Scotch bonnet many sizes too large for Wat, they soon stood ready for departure. Downstairs they went, the philosopher briskly leading the way, and Wat's red legs descending one step at a time as fast as they could. Arrived at the front door, however, the sergeant, standing there in his stiff long coat and leathern belt, ruthlessly seized a hand of each of his prisoners, and no longer permitted them to go at large. The philosopher screwed up his lips, and had hard work to stay tears from flowing, but

what was left uncovered of Wat's plump face and neck betokened no signs of fear. He looked up at the big, awkward form as they went along, and said—

“Does you like to walk in the middle?”

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